EDITED BY

RUBINA RAJA

The Oxford Handbook *of* THE HELLENISTIC & ROMAN NEAR EAST

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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CIP data is on file at the Library of Congress

ISBN 978–0–19–085815–5
eISBN 978–0–19–085817–9

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190858155.001.0001

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39.1. Manbij/Hierapolis, water pool and ruins of the sanctuary in 1911, Max von Oppenheim. © Hausarchiv des Bankhauses Sal. Oppenheim.

39.2. Manbij (Hierapolis), late fourth century bc, didrachm in the name of the Abd Hadad, silver, 7.85 g, British Museum 1902,0610.55. © Trustees of the British Museum.

39.3. Caracalla, ad 215–217, Hierapolis, tetradrachm, silver, 14.61 g, British Museum 1985,1114.6AN691395001. © Trustees of the British Museum.

39.4. View of the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus on the summit of Dülük Baba Tepesi. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

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39.7. Seal impression with an emperor sacrificing in front of Jupiter Dolichenus, Doliche, burnt clay, 25 × 21 mm. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

40.1. Bronze coin, reverse. Inscription "of brother peoples," thunderbolt. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques, AA.GR.1118 (source: gallica.bnf.fr/BnF).

40.2. Apamea, a view on the main, colonnaded street (© C. Saliou, 1992).

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Contributors

Nadia Ali is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie/FIAS fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Aix-Marseille University (IMeRA) and associate researcher at the Institute of Research and Study on the Arab and Muslim Worlds (IREMAM). She has just completed her first book entitled *Qusayr Amra and the Power of Images in Early Islam*.

Julien Aliquot (PhD Tours University 2006, Dr. habil. École pratique des hautes études 2021) is assigned to the Hisoma research unit in the Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée (Lyon) as a senior researcher of the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Since 2017 he has led the international program of the Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie (IGLS, https://igls.mom.fr). He is the author of *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, Vol. 11, *Mont Hermon* (2008) and Vol. 8/1, *Beyrouth et sa région* (2023), *La vie religieuse au Liban sous l'Empire romain* (2009), and *Inscriptions grecques et latines du Musée national de Beyrouth* (2016, with Jean-Baptiste Yon). He also has co-edited *La Phénicie hellénistique* (2015) and *Sources de l'histoire de Tyr* (2 vols., 2011 and 2017). His current work focuses on the epigraphic corpora of northeast Jordan (with Nabil Bader) and Tyre in Lebanon.

Nathanael Andrade is a professor in the department of history at Binghamton University, SUNY. He has authored many publications on the Roman Near East and the Roman Empire's connections with the societies of Asia. These include *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), *The Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity: Networks and the Movement of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and *Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Gideon Avni is chief archaeologist for the Israel Antiquities Authority and professor of archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His academic interests focus on various aspects of classical, late antique, early Islamic, and medieval archaeology, the archaeology of Jerusalem, nomads and sedentary societies in the desert areas of the Near East, and the diffusion of technologies and movement of people in Eurasia. His recent books are *The Byzantine–Islamic Transition in Palestine: An Archaeological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and *A New Old City: Jerusalem in the Late Roman Period* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2017).

Janine Balty, Dr. habil., honorary researcher at the Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée de Syrie. She is author of *Mosaïques antiques de Syrie* (Brussels, 1977), *La mosaïque de Sarrîn (Osrhoène)* (Beirut, 1990), and *Mosaïques antiques du Proche-Orient: chronologie, iconographie, interprétation* (Besançon, 1995). She has published widely on the archaeology and history of Apamea-on-the-Orontes (Syria) and on classical iconography (portraits, sarcophagi, mosaics) in various periodicals; more recently, she has written the chapter titled "Mosaics" in Blackwell Companions' *The Hellenistic and Roman Near East* edited by Ted Kaizer (Hoboken, 2022). She is co-author, with Jean-Charles Balty, of the large "Introduction historiographique" in the new edition of Franz Cumont's *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Rome, 2015). Forthcoming is the publication of the mosaics of the Maison du Cerf at Apamea in Balty et al., *La Maison du Cerf et ses mosaïques: la Maison des Chapiteaux à consoles*, Fouilles d'Apamée de Syrie, 5 (Brussels, 2022).

Jean-Charles Balty, D.Phil., has been curator of Greek and Roman antiquities in the Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, Brussels (1963–1995) and professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles (1968–2001). He is professor emeritus of Sorbonne University, where he held the chair of Roman archaeology and history of art (1995–2002), and associated member of the Institut de France (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres). He is the author of *CVRIA ORDINIS: Recherches d'archéologie et d'urbanisme antique sur les curies provinciales du monde romain* (Brussels, 1991). He participated in the excavations at Alba Fucens (Italy, 1961–1967) and directed the Belgian excavations at Apamea (Syria, 1965–2001). With Janine Balty, he published *Apamée et l'Apamène antique*, Scripta varia historica (Brussels, 2013), with Daniel Cazes *Portraits impériaux de Béziers: le groupe statuaire du forum* (Toulouse, 1995), and with Daniel Cazes and Emmanuelle Rosso the first four volumes of the catalogue of the Roman portraits from Chiragan, *Sculptures antiques de Chiragan (Martres-Tolosane*), I.1–3 and I.5 (Toulouse 2005, 2008, 2012, 2020).

Michael Blömer is an archaeologist whose research revolves around Asia Minor and the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman period. He has worked on urbanism, sculpture, religious iconography, and the religious life of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. He is also an experienced field archaeologist and directed the excavations at Doliche, southeast Turkey. He received his PhD from Münster University in 2009. He is currently professor of classical archaeology at Münster University and working at the Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

Mary T. Boatwright is professor emerita of ancient history in the Department of Classical Studies, Duke University (Durham, NC, USA); she focuses on Roman imperial history, especially cultural and institutional history. Some of her publications have illuminated the city and elite of Rome; others have investigated communities and practices far from the capital. Her books include *Hadrian and the City of Rome* (1987), *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (2000), *Peoples of the Roman World* (2012), and *Imperial Women of Rome: Power, Gender, Context* (2021). She has also co-authored textbooks such as *The Romans: From Village to Empire*, with D. Gargola, N. Lenski, and R. J. A. Talbert (2nd ed.).

Olympia Bobou was born in Greece, where she studied history and archaeology, receiving an M.Phil. in classical archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She continued her studies at Oxford, where she completed a doctoral thesis on statues of children in the Hellenistic period, under the supervision of Professor Bert Smith. She worked as a research assistant and lecturer at various institutions in the UK, including the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. She has published a monograph and various articles on the representations of children, as well as articles on emotions in ancient art. She is now working at the Circular Economy and Urban Sustainability in Antiquity Project, UrbNet, Aarhus University, as an assistant professor.

Corinne Bonnet was professor of Greek history at the University of Toulouse—Jean Jaurès from 2003 to January 2024 and is an associate member of the PLH (Patrimoine Littérature Histoire) Laboratory. She is now professor of the History of religions at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. From 2017 to June 2023, she was principal investigator of the ERC Advanced Grant project "Mapping Ancient Polytheisms. Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency." She is the author of several monographs on the history of religions in the ancient Mediterranean world, as well as over two hundred articles. She is particularly interested in the relations and interactions between the Greek and Phoenician worlds, from the Archaic to the Roman periods. She also studied the different historiographic discourses related to these issues.

Ross Burns has published a range of books on the history and archaeology of Syria including *Monuments of Syria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992, 1999, 2009), histories of Damascus (Routledge, 2005, 2nd ed. 2019) and Aleppo (Routledge, 2017), and his study titled the *Origins of the Colonnaded Streets in the Cities of the Roman East* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He is currently participating in a study on the reuse of sacred spaces during the centuries of transition from Roman, through Byzantine, and into Islamic times as well as a short history of Syria told through forty monumental sites or buildings. His website www.monumentsofsyria.com provides a visual survey of the sites surveyed in the book of that name.

Matthew P. Canepa is professor and Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Presidential Chair in art history and archaeology of Ancient Iran at the University of California, Irvine, where he directs the PhD Specialization in Ancient Iran and the Premodern Persianate World. An elected fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and former Guggenheim fellow, Canepa is the author of numerous publications including the award-winning books *The Iranian Expanse: Transforming Royal Identity through Architecture, Landscape, and the Built Environment, 550 BCE–642 CE* (2020 James R. Wiseman Award, Archaeological Institute of America) and *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (2010 James Henry Breasted Award, American Historical Association). His most recent volume is entitled *Persian Cultures of Power and the Entanglement of the Afro-Eurasian World* (Getty Research Institute Publications).

Robert Carter has worked in Arabian archaeology for nearly thirty years, specializing in eastern Arabia and the Gulf. He has conducted research in all the GCC countries as well as Iran and Iraq, and has interests and publications in Neolithic settlement and seafaring, Bronze Age trade, urbanism, historic and prehistoric globalization processes, medieval port towns, the archaeology of Christianity in the Gulf, the Chalcolithic (ʿUbaid Period) of Mesopotamia, archaeological ceramics, pearl fishing, and several other topics and periods. He has particular interests in the maritime cultures of the Gulf, ranging from the first traders of the Neolithic through to the pearl-fishing towns and villages of the eighteenth–twentieth centuries ad. His most recent major project was on recent historical archaeology (*Origins of Doha and Qatar Project*), and he is currently starting a new project in Early Islamic and Christian archaeology of Qatar. He was professor of Arabian and Middle Eastern archaeology at UCL Qatar until 2019, then worked as an advisor for the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities; he is now with Qatar Museums as Senior Archaeology Academic and Fieldwork Development Specialist.

Anne Hunnell Chen is an assistant professor in the Art History and Visual Culture and Experimental Humanities Programs at Bard College. Dr Chen specializes in the art and archaeology of the globally connected Sasanian and Roman worlds. Highlights of her career so far include a fellowship in the Department of the Ancient Near East at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and a postdoctoral associateship in Yale University's ARCHAIA program for the Study of Premodern Cultures and Societies. She has published on Roman, Persian, and digital humanities topics and is also the founder and co-director of the International (Digital) Dura-Europos Archive (IDEA). Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, IDEA is aimed at dislodging enduring impacts of colonialism through digital reassembly and recontextualization of legacy archaeological data from the site of Dura-Europos (Syria). Dr. Chen also serves as network co-chair and Annotations Activity co-coordinator for the international Pelagios Network.

Graeme Clarke was honorary visiting professor in the School of Classical Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia, being emeritus professor of both the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University. He was previously a director of the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University (1981–1999) and before that professor of classical studies at the University of Melbourne (1969–1980). He was a director of excavations at the site of Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates in north Syria from 1986 until 2010, after which time excavations perforce ceased. As well as editing the series of seven volumes of *Reports* on these excavations, he has also published widely on early Christianity, especially in North Africa (notably on Minucius Felix, Cyprian).

Henry P. Colburn has held fellowships at the Harvard Art Museums, the Getty Research Institute, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Bard Graduate Center. He is currently a research associate of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and adjunct faculty at Hofstra University, the Bard Prison Initiative, the City University of New York, and the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. His research focuses on the art and archaeology of ancient Iran and its interactions with neighboring regions. He is the author of *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt* (2020) and co-editor of *In Search of Cultural Identities in Western and Central Asia: A Festschrift for Prudence Oliver Harper* (2023).

Kimberley Czajkowski is senior lecturer in ancient history at the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh. Her research interests lie in the history of the Near Eastern provinces in the early to high Roman Empire. Her work often focuses on the legal culture of the region, though she has interests in various related themes, including the history of the Jewish people, Roman law, and "Romanization." She is author of *Localized Law: The Babatha and Salome Komaise Archives* (2017), and co-editor of *Law in the Roman Provinces* (2020). She is also co-author of *Herod in History: Nicolaus of Damascus and the Augustan Context* (2021).

Andrea U. De Giorgi is professor of classical studies at the Florida State University and specializes in Roman urbanism and visual culture from the origins to late antiquity, with emphasis on the eastern Mediterranean. He is the author of *Ancient Antioch: From the Seleucid Era to the Islamic Conquest* (2016), co-author of *Antioch: A History* (2021), editor of *Cosa and the Colonial Landscape of Republican Italy* (2019), and editor of *Antioch on the Orontes. History, Society, Ecology, and Visual Culture* (2024). He has directed excavations and surveys in Turkey, Syria, Georgia, Jordan, Israel, and the UAE. Since 2013, he has directed the Cosa Excavations and, since 2024, the Montereggi Project in Italy; currently, he is studying the 1930s Antioch and Daphne collections at the Princeton University Art Museum.

Lucinda Dirven studied history of art and theology at the University of Leiden where she obtained her PhD in 1999 with *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos: A Case Study of Religious Interaction* (Leiden: Brill). Since then, she taught at the departments of archaeology and history of the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam. Currently she is professor of antique religions at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Her research concentrates on the Roman Near East in general and Dura, Hatra, and Palmyra in particular. Her hallmark is the combination of literary and archaeological sources in order to reconstruct the religious history in the region.

Avner Ecker is a classical archaeologist in the Institute of Archaeology and in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Currently, he is also a member of the research group Remapping Ancient Elites: Between East and West in the Mandel Scholion Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is co-editor of the *Corpus*

Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae (CIIP), writing a book titled *The Rise of the Polis in Roman Palestine*, excavating the Jezreel Valley's ancient Roman *polis* of Gaba Philippi (Tel Abu Shusha near Mishmar Ha-Emeq—part of the Jezreel Valley Regional Project), and publishing the Greek ostraca from Maresha (O. Maresha).

Peter Edwell is associate professor in ancient history in the Department of History and Archaeology at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. He researches and teaches on the relationship between the Roman and Iranian worlds and in the area of late antiquity/early Byzantium more broadly. He is currently a member of the project Crises of Leadership in the Eastern Roman Empire funded by the Australian Research Council and has written a number of books and articles focusing on the relationship between Rome and its powerful eastern neighbor. His most recent monograph, *Rome and Persia at War: Imperial Competition and Contact, 193–363 CE* was published in 2021 by Routledge.

David Engels is chair of Roman History at the University of Brussels (ULB) since 2008 and currently works as research professor at the Instytut Zachodni in Poznań, Poland. Author and editor of numerous scholarly books and papers on ancient history, cultural comparatism, and the philosophy of history, his book publications include *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen* (Stuttgart, 2009); *Le Déclin* (Paris, 2013); *Von Platon bis Fukuyama* (as ed.; Brussels, 2015); *Studies on the Seleukid Empire between East and West* (Leuven, 2017); *Rome and the Seleukid East* (ed. with Altay Coskun, Brussels, 2019); *Renovatio Europae* (as ed., Poznań, 2019); Oswald Spengler: *Werk, Deutung, Rezeption* (Stuttgart, 2021); *Europa Aeterna* (as ed., Poznań, 2022).

Zbigniew T. Fiema has been involved in research on the Near East in the Roman-Byzantine period since the mid-1980s. His interests are concentrated on ancient urbanism, trade and economy, and military architecture. He has excavated in Egypt (Alexandria), Syria (Palmyra), and Saudi Arabia (Madâ'in Sâlih/Hegra), but Petra in Jordan remains his scholarly focus. He has directed the fieldwork of three excavation projects there (Petra Church Project, the Roman Street in Petra Project, and the Finnish Jabal Haroun Project). Fiema has lectured in archaeology at various academic institutions in Europe and the United States. He was fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, and at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. Currently he is docent in classical archaeology at the University of Helsinki and he participates in a German mapping project in Petra.

Leonardo Gregoratti was educated at the Universities of Udine (Italy) and Trier (Germany). He has conducted research in Udine, Trier, Kiel, and Bergen. Between 2013 and 2018 he collaborated with the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University as IAS Fellow. Recently he has been a visiting researcher at the University of Freiburg (Germany). His research interests include Roman history and epigraphy and the history of western Asia, in particular the Roman Near East, Palmyra, long-distance trade, and the Parthian Kingdom. He collaborated as classical historian with the archaeological missions conducted by Udine University in Syria and now collaborates with Iranian colleagues.

Julia Hoffmann-Salz is an ancient historian who has worked at the University of Cologne and the Free University of Berlin. After receiving her PhD at the University of Bonn with a work that compared the economic impact of the Roman conquest in regions in Hispania Tarraconensis, Africa Proconsularis, and Syria, she has recently written a second book on the Ituraeans and their neighbors during the transformation of Hellenistic Syria into the Roman Near East. Her research focuses on communities in the ancient Near East from the late Seleucid period to the third century AD and beyond. She has recently co-hosted an

international conference on the Near East under the Severans and workshops on the use and meaning of caves in the ancient Near East from prehistory to the Middle Ages. She is also starting on a new project on the role of enemies for the Hellenistic empires.

Oliver D. Hoover is an honorary curator at the American Numismatic Society, New York. He has published widely on Seleucid and other Near Eastern Hellenistic coinages, with particular interest in their political, cultural, and art historical implications. He co-authored *Seleucid Coins, Part II: Seleucus IV through Antiochus XIII* (2008) with Arthur Houghton and Catharine Lorber and has worked on the American Numismatic Society's important digital resource, *Seleucid Coins Online* (http://numismatics.org/sco/). His current focus is on the completion of a multivolume handbook of Greek coinage, eleven volumes of which have been published so far.

Hartmut Leppin has been professor of ancient history at Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main since 2001. In 2015 he was awarded the Leibniz-Prize of the DFG. He was fellow at the Faculty of Classics in Cambridge and member of the IAS Princeton. Since 2019 he has been president of the Historische Kolleg München. His main research interests are the history of ideas in the ancient world and late antiquity, with a particular focus on the non-classical traditions. Currently he is principal investigator of a DFG-long-term project producing a new edition, translation, and commentary of John of Ephesus's *Ecclesiastical History*, one of the major understudied sources of late antiquity. Recent publications include *Die frühen Christen: Von den Anfängen bis Konstantin*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2020), English translation in preparation with Cambridge University Press; *Paradoxe der Parrhesie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

Pierre Leriche was born in 1940. Now Emeritus Directeur de Recherche in CNRS, Laboratory Archaeology of the Near East Nanterre. Agrégé in history and geography in 1968, Leriche was lecturer of Greek history at the University of Caen for five years. Interested by the meeting and mixing of civilizations, he spent four years in the Institut Français d'Archéologie in Beirut, then was recruited in 1978 as scientific member of CNRS in Laboratory of Archaeology in Ecole Normale Supérieure Paris. In 1984, he became State Doctor in Greek History and in 1986, Directeur de Recherche in CNRS. Applying Wheeler's method of archaeology, he participated in excavations on classical sites in the Orient: Aï Khanum (Afghanistan), Ibn Hani and Apamea (Syria), and others. He then created and led the "French-Syrian Archaeological Expedition in Europos-Dura" (MFSED, 1983–2011), the French Uzbek Archaeological Expedition in Northern Bactria (MAFUZBactria, 1993–2016), and other smaller excavations in the Near East.

Achim Lichtenberger (PhD 2001, Tübingen University) is a professor of classical archaeology and the director of the archaeological museum at Münster University where he is also the director of the research center for ancient numismatics. His research interests are the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, iconography, numismatics, landscapes, ancient religion, and settlement archaeology. In the last decade he has co-directed archaeological fieldwork projects in Armenia, Israel, and Jordan. Lichtenberger is author of several monographs, *Der Olymp: Sitz der Götter zwischen Himmel und Erde* (2021), *Terrakotten aus Beit Nattif* (2016), *Severus Pius Augustus* (2011), *Kulte und Kultur der Dekapolis* (2003), and *Baupolitik Herodes des Großen* (1999).

John MacGinnis is senior curator at the British Museum, where he has been lead archaeologist in the "Iraq Scheme" archaeological training program. His interests are the archaeology and epigraphy of Mesopotamia in the first millennium bc, i.e., the Assyrian through to the Parthian periods. He has worked in countries across the Middle East, including

Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, and Cyprus; he has also worked in India and Pakistan. From 2016 to 2021 he directed excavations in the Darband-i Rania Pass in Iraqi Kurdistan, including at the site of Qalatga Darband, a fortified settlement dating to the early Parthian period, which is characterized by multiple elements exhibiting Hellenistic cultural influence. Prior to this he was a field director at Ziyaret Tepe in southeastern Turkey, the site of the Neo-Assyrian provincial capital of Tušhan, and was also archaeological advisor to the High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation.

Volker Menze is professor and head of the Department of Historical Studies at Central European University in Vienna. He has worked on the post-Chalcedonian Christological Controversy and published a book on *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford Early Christian Studies, 2008). He edited a few Syriac texts related to non-Chalcedonian Eucharist communities and the early establishment of an underground church against the ruling Chalcedonian Church of the Empire. His recent work includes an edited volume on Syriac hagiography (*The Wandering Holy Man: The* Life of Barsauma, *Christian Asceticism and Religious Conflict in Late Antique Palestine*) and articles on the politics of church councils, book burnings, bribery, episcopal nepotism, and alternative ecclesiologies in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. He published the monograph *Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria: The Last Pharaoh and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Later Roman Empire* in the Oxford Early Christian Studies series in 2023.

Kristina M. Neumann is associate professor of Roman/digital history in the Department of History at the University of Houston, Texas. Her monograph, *Antioch in Syria: A History from Coins (300 BCE–450 CE)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), applies digital mapping and exploratory data analysis to the numismatic evidence as a means of critically reassessing the relationship between civic and imperial power within the city and region. She is also the co-director of SYRIOS, a National Endowment for the Humanities–funded, web-based exhibit bringing the coins and history of ancient Syria to a wide public audience (https://syrios.uh.edu). She is executive producer of the podcast, *Public Historians at Work*, through the University of Houston's Center for Public History, and has worked with archaeological projects in Rome, Pompeii, and Israel.

Simone Eid Paturel studied Spanish and Latin American literature at Paris-Sorbonne University, Egyptology at the Institute Kheops in Paris, History and Archaeology (BA) and the History of Ideas (MA) at the University of London. Her PhD was completed in 2014 at the University of Newcastle. She is the author of "Reconstructing the History of the Cypriot Maronites" (*Journal of Cyprus Studies*, 2009) and *Baalbek-Heliopolis, the Bekaa and Berytus from 100 BCE to 400 CE: A Landscape Transformed* (Brill, 2019).

Adam Pažout is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action fellow at the Universtitat Autònoma de Barcelona with project 'VIA-TARIQ: Analysing the long-term change and persistency of the Roman road system in the Levant'. He earned his PhD in archaeology at the University of Haifa, Israel, for his dissertation on spatial analysis of rural fortifications and road system in the region of the city of Hippos. Between 2014–2019 he was involved in the Hippos-Sussita Excavation Project as an area supervisor. In 2017–2019 he co-directed several small-scale excavations in the context of Hippos Regional Research, together with Michael Eisenberg and Mechael Osband. Between 2021-2024, he was part of the MINERVA project, headed by Tom Brughmans, at the Centre for Urban Network Evolutions, Aarhus University, headed by Rubina Raja, focusing on the Roman road and transport network in the Eastern Mediterranean. His research interests include Hellenistic and Roman southern Levant, Roman roads and

transportation, rural and urban fortifications, landscape archaeology, and application of GIS in archaeology.

Rubina Raja (D.Phil. 2005, University of Oxford) is professor of classical archaeology and art and chair at Aarhus University, Denmark. She is also centre director of the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre of Excellence for Urban Network Evolutions (grant: DNRF119) and heads several further collaborative research projects with a focus on West Asia and Palmyrene culture and society, including the Palmyra Portrait Project. Raja has published widely on the Mediterranean region and West Asia from the Hellenistic period into the medieval period with a focus on global outlooks as expressed through local behaviours. She specialises in urban societies and their diverse networks and cultures, including their architectural and other visual cultures, such as portrait cultures.

Anna-Katharina Rieger was trained as a classical archaeologist at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, where she received her PhD. Her broader interests cover material religion, arid landscapes, space and mobility, urbanism, iconography, and economic and social history in the central and eastern Mediterranean. After positions at the German Archaeological Institute, Rome, and the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, she was research assistant and visiting lecturer at Göttingen, Halle-Wittenberg, and Berlin. She directed a landscape-archaeological project in the Eastern Marmarica on water management, dryland agriculture, and mobile life-strategies. With a project on sacred places in the Roman Near East she was member of the ERC Advanced Grant "Lived Ancient Religion" (dir. Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke) at the University of Erfurt. She was awarded fellowships of the Humboldt Foundation and the Excellence Initiative of the University of Warsaw. Recent publications cover sacred space in the Palmyrene, and religion and local identity in the Lebanon Mountains.

Steven A. Rosen is the emeritus Canada chair of Near Eastern Archaeology at Ben-Gurion University. He received his doctorate from the University of Chicago. Prior to the university, he worked for the Negev Emergency Survey. He has excavated numerous sites in the Negev, ranging from prehistoric through modern times, focusing on the pastoral societies of the region. He has also pioneered the study of stone tools in the Metal Ages. He is a member of the scientific board of *Paléorient*, and past editor of *Journal of the Israel Prehistoric Society*. He served on the Archaeological Council of Israel for more than twenty years and as BGU vice president for External Affairs and deputy rector. Recent books are *Revolutions in the Desert: The Rise of Mobile Pastoral Societies in the Negev and the Arid Zones of the Southern Levant* and *Flint Trade in the Protohistoric Levant* with Francesca Manclossi.

Catherine Saliou is professor of Roman history at the University Paris 8 and directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris Sciences et Lettres University. Her principal research interests are urban history, history of architecture, and the late antique Roman Near East. Her main publications pertaining to Antioch or ancient Syria are *Antioche de Syrie: histoire, images et traces de la ville antique* (edited book, in collaboration with P.-L. Gatier and B. Cabouret, Paris-Lyon, 2004), *Gaza dans l'antiquité tardive: archéologie, rhétorique et histoire* (edited book, Salerno, 2005), *Les sources de l'histoire du paysage urbain d'Antioche sur l'Oront*e (edited book, Paris, 2012, online), Libanios, *Discours*, III: *discours 11, Antiochicos*, edition and translation M. Casevitz and O. Lagacherie, commentary C. Saliou (Paris, 2016), and *De Pompée à Muhammad: Le Proche Orient romain, I*^{er} *s. av.-VII*^{e} *s. apr. J.-C.* (Paris, 2020).

Stephan G. Schmid has been professor of classical archaeology at Humboldt-Universitaet zu Berlin since 2008. Previously he held a position as professor of classical archaeology at the

Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, and earlier he was the deputy director of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece. He holds a PhD from Basel University (Switzerland) and a habilitation from the Université de Paris I—Sorbonne (France). His research interests are, on the one hand, related to his long-term excavation activities in Petra (Jordan) and Eretria (Greece). On the other hand, he is working on the relationship between sedentary and non-sedentary populations, luxury architecture in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean. For some years, his interest focused on Cyprus, starting with research on the history of archaeology in Cyprus, and leading to a new project aiming at better understanding the territorial organization of Cypriot Iron Age polities, including the excavation of a sanctuary of the Great Goddess in Idalion.

Eivind Heldaas Seland is professor of ancient history and premodern global history at the University of Bergen. His research interest is in the interaction between environment, economy, ideology, and political power in shaping complex societies/early states in the ancient world. He has worked extensively with the Indian Ocean/Red Sea region and the Near East, but is also interested in the Mediterranean and Central Asia. Seland is the author of *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea: Palmyra in the World Trade of the First Three Centuries CE* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016).

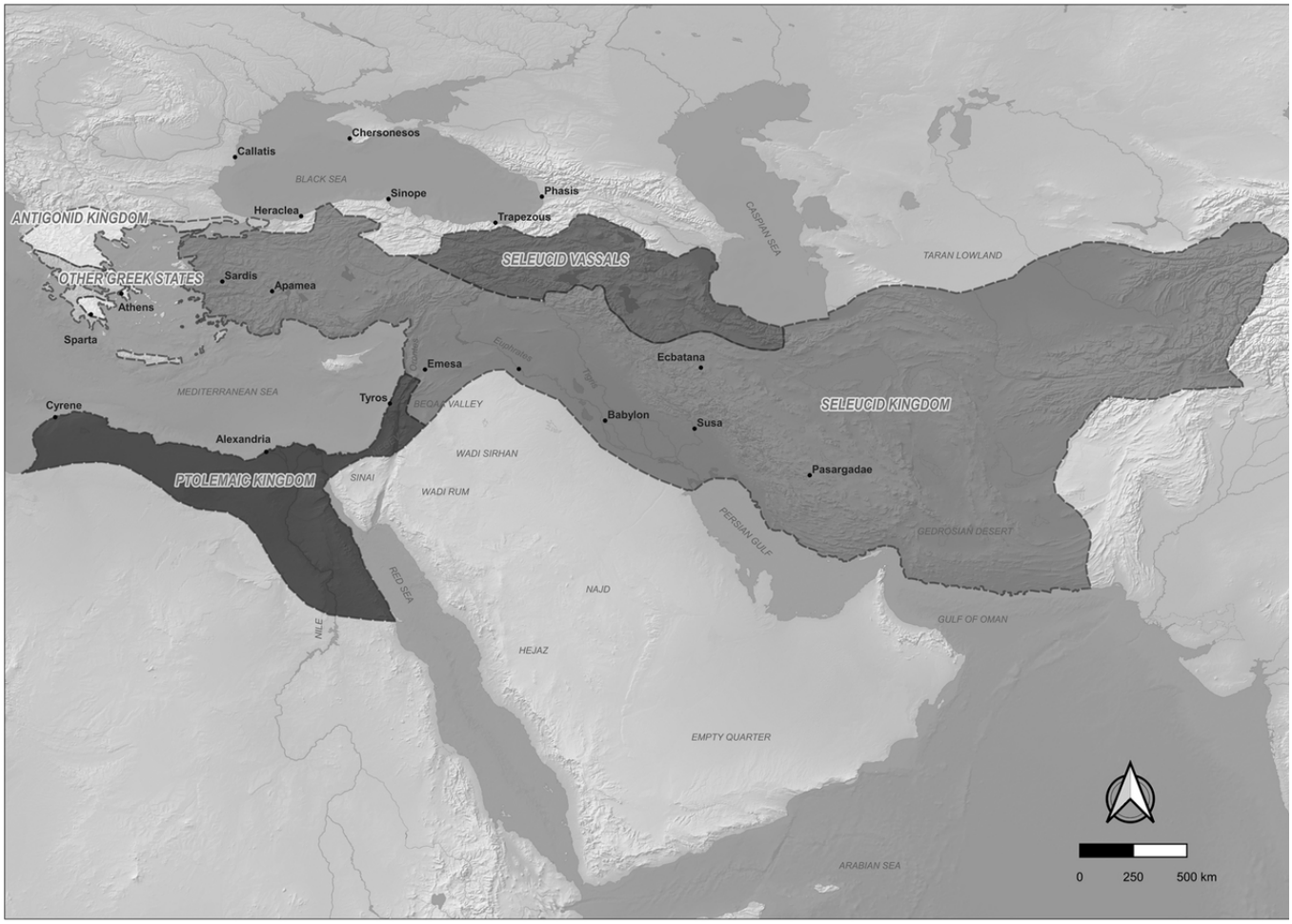
Michael A. Speidel studied ancient history and other ancient world sciences at the Universities of Zürich, Basel, Heidelberg, and Oxford. He is professor of ancient history at the University of Zürich. He also holds the position of director of the Mavors-Institute for Ancient Military History. He received several grants and academic honors, including guest and research professorships in France, Germany, Poland, Turkey, and Switzerland. His fields of research include social, cultural, military, provincial, administrative, economic, religious, and political history, as well as Roman epigraphy, numismatics, and papyrology.

Karl Strobel is professor emeritus of ancient history and archaeology at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, where he was professor ordinarius (chair) 1998–2020. He studies ancient history, classical philology, archaeology, Egyptology, and Hittitology at the University of Munich and made his habilitation at the University of Heidelberg. His research is focused on the Roman Empire, Roman military history, ancient economy, archaeology and culture of Asia Minor, and on the ancient Near East in late Bronze and early Iron Ages. He was head of the archaeological research of the city of Tavium and of the epigraphic survey in the province of Yozgat, Turkey. His last major publications are on the emperor Trajan (2nd ed. 2019, Romanian ed. 2022) and on southeast Europe (fourth century bc to third century ad). He edited Eothen 16 (2008) on the geography and topography of Anatolia in the second and first millennia bc, and Eothen 17 (2011) on Anatolia and Syria after Šuppiluliuma II (ca. 1200–800/700 bc).

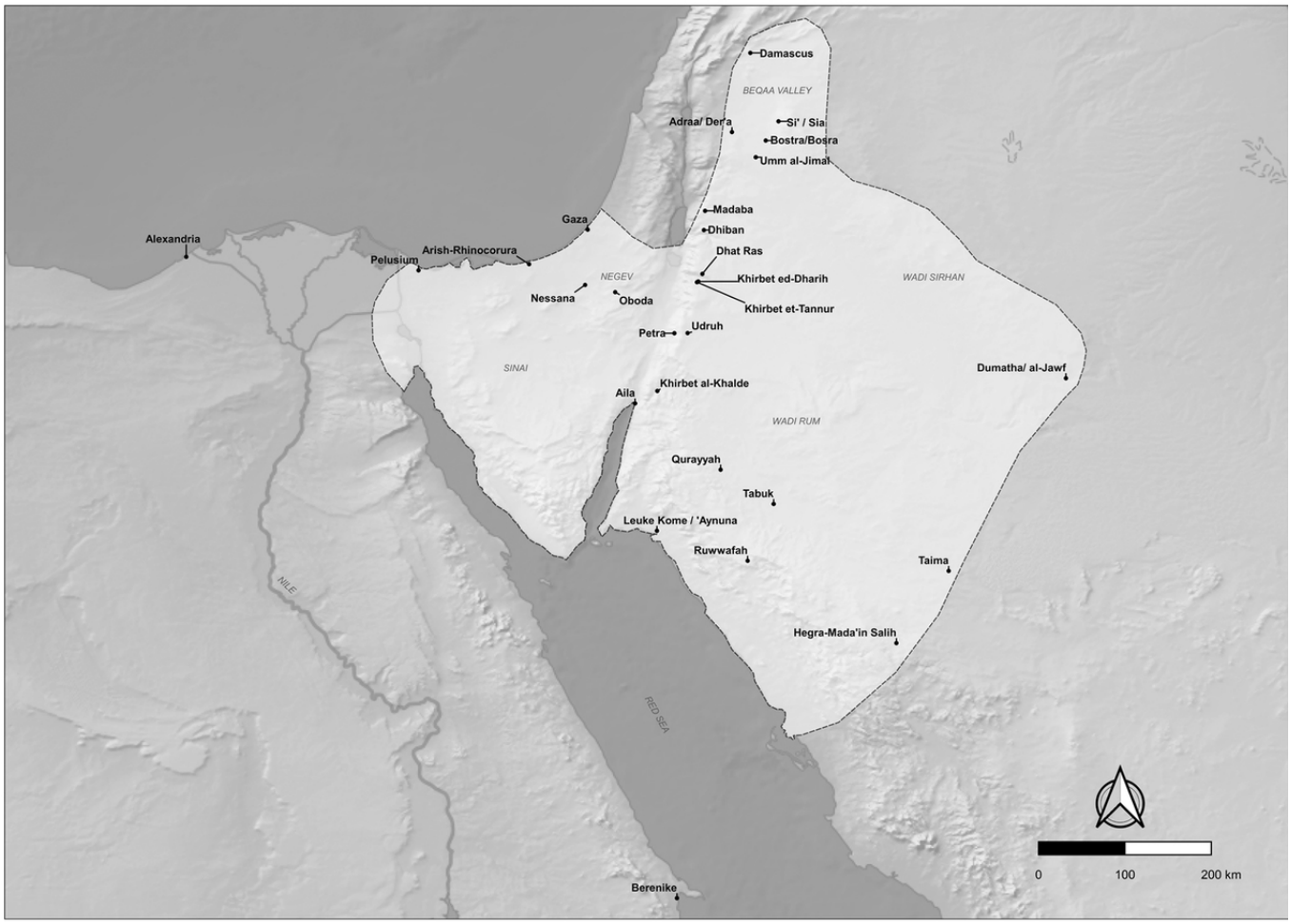
Laurent Tholbecq is professor of classical archaeology (Roman Provinces) at the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). He has worked in the Near East since 1992 and headed the French archaeological mission in Petra since 2013. His expertise is in Hellenistic and Roman architecture in the Near East; he has a particular interest in Nabataean studies and *Provincia Arabia*.

Miguel John Versluys is professor and chair of classical and mediterranean archaeology at Leiden University. His research explores the cultural dynamics of the Hellenistic-Roman world (roughly 200 bc–ad 200) from the point of view of Afro-Eurasia. He investigates these processes from local, regional, and global perspectives and by means of a variety of methodologies and techniques. His research has two distinct focus points: the interconnection

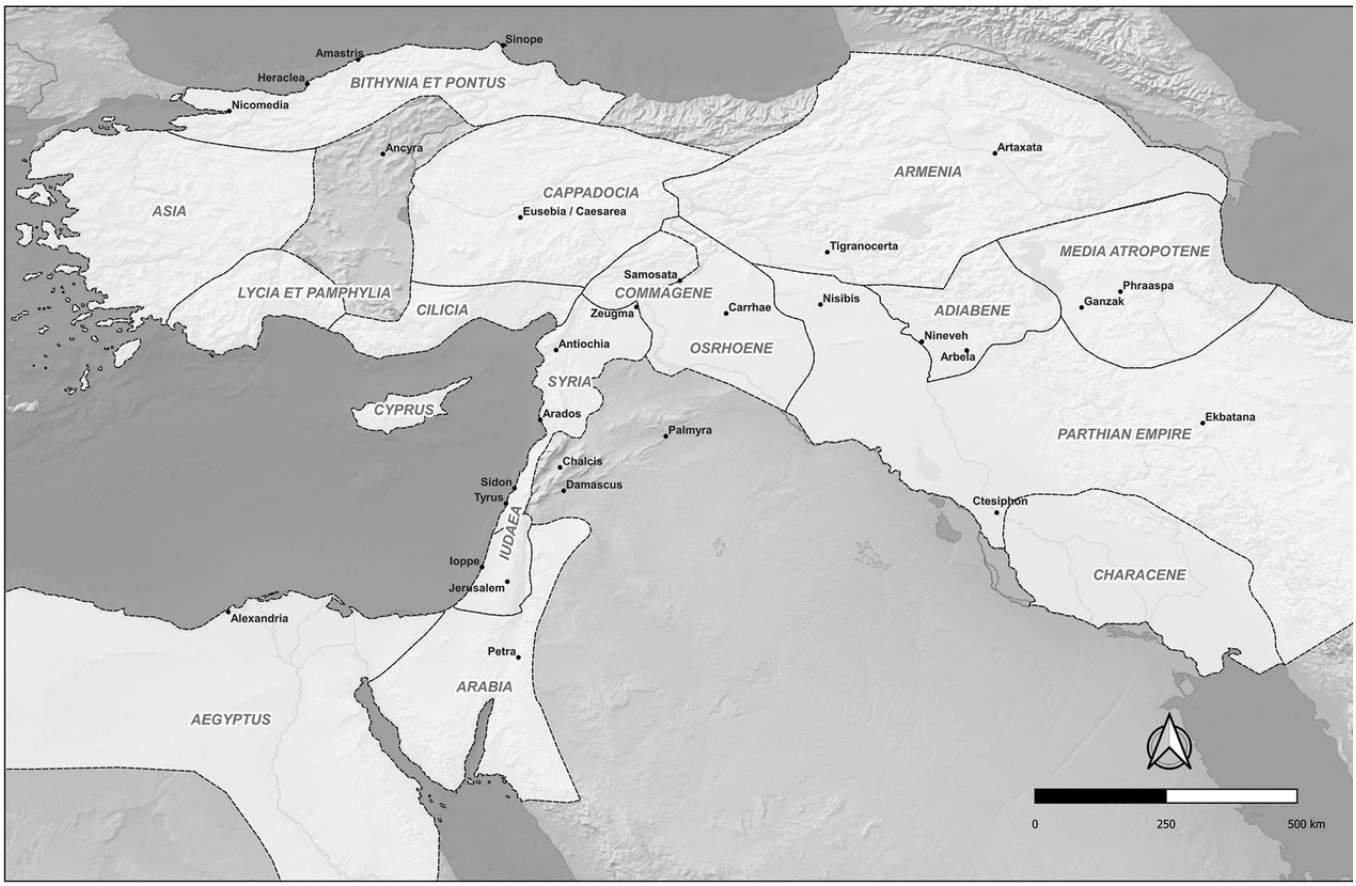
of cultures and their various identities (globalization), and the interdependence of objects and people. He is the author of *Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World: Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I* (2017) and the editor of *Persianism in Antiquity* (2017); *"Common Dwelling Place of All the Gods": Hellenistic Commagene in Its Local, Regional and Global Eurasian Context* (2020) and *Alexandria the* cosmopolis: *A Global Perspective* (2022).



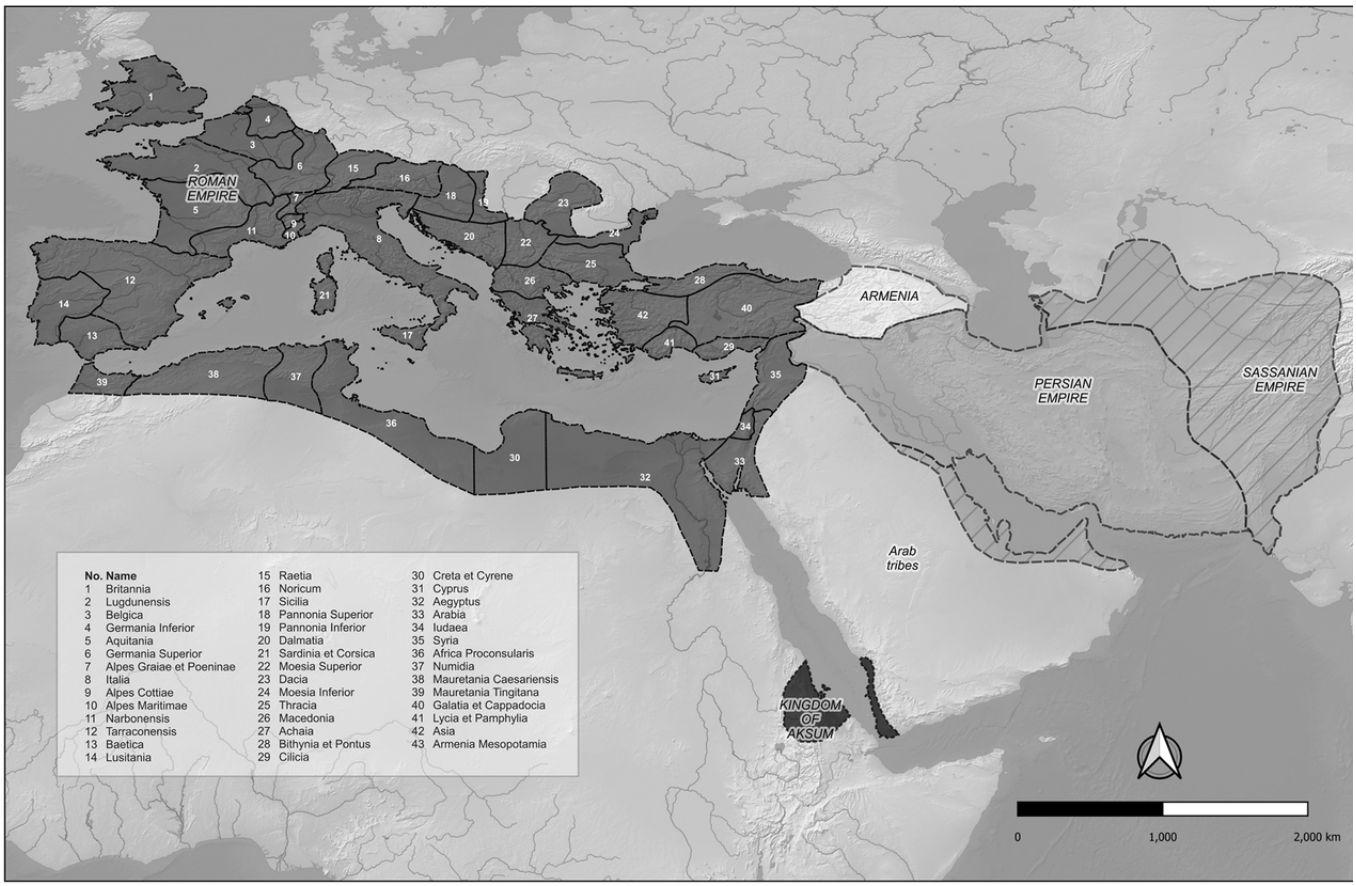
MAP 1. Hellenistic Near East after Alexander the Great, c. 250 **BC** © Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after Map 12.1 in Bang, P. F. and Scheidel, W. (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



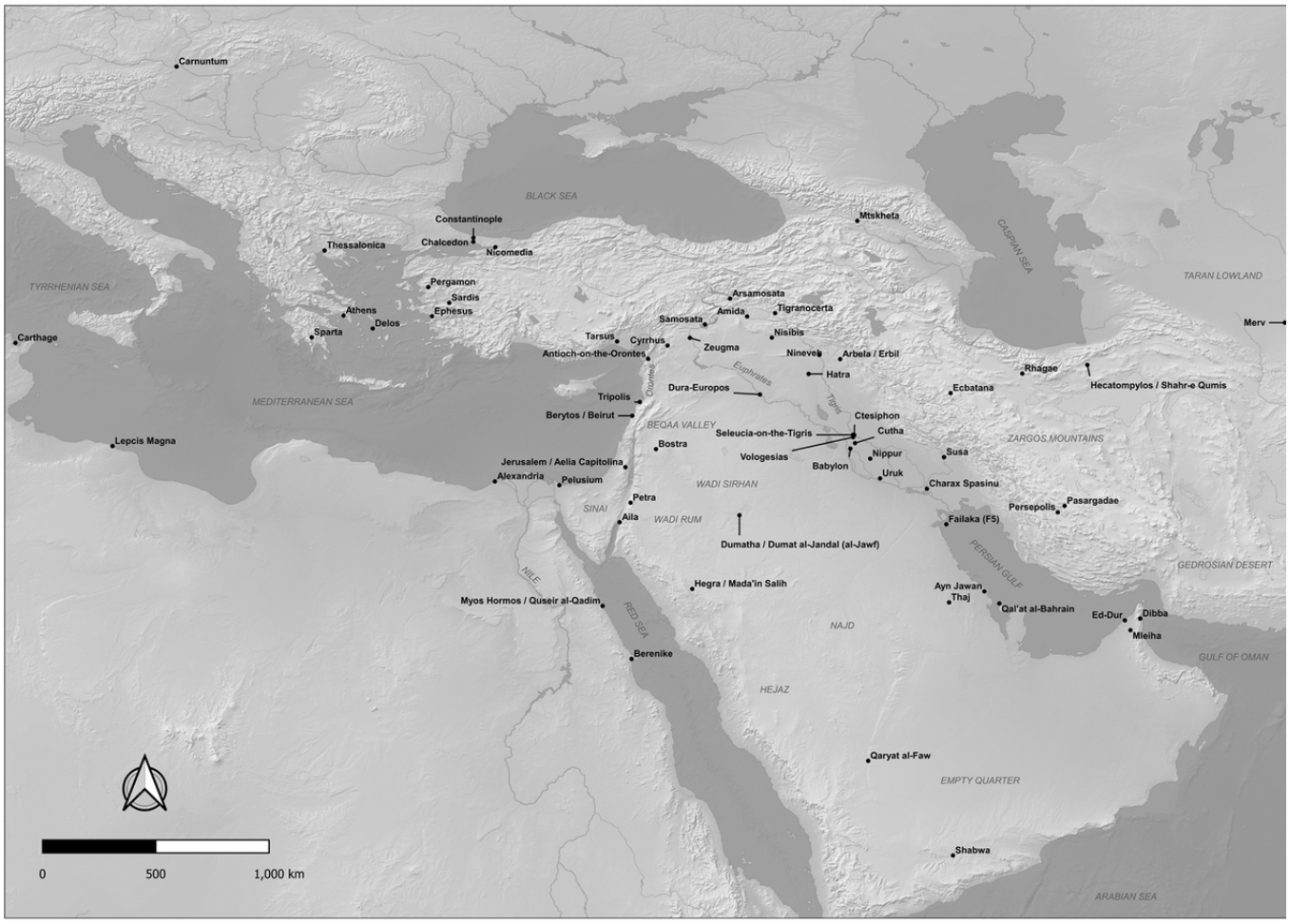
MAP 2. Nabatean Kingdom at its largest extent (© Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after Figure 1 in Durand, C. and Gerber, Y. (2014). "The pottery production from Hegra/Madāʾin Sālih (Saudi Arabia) during the Nabataean period. Preliminary results, 2008-2011." In *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 44, 153–167).



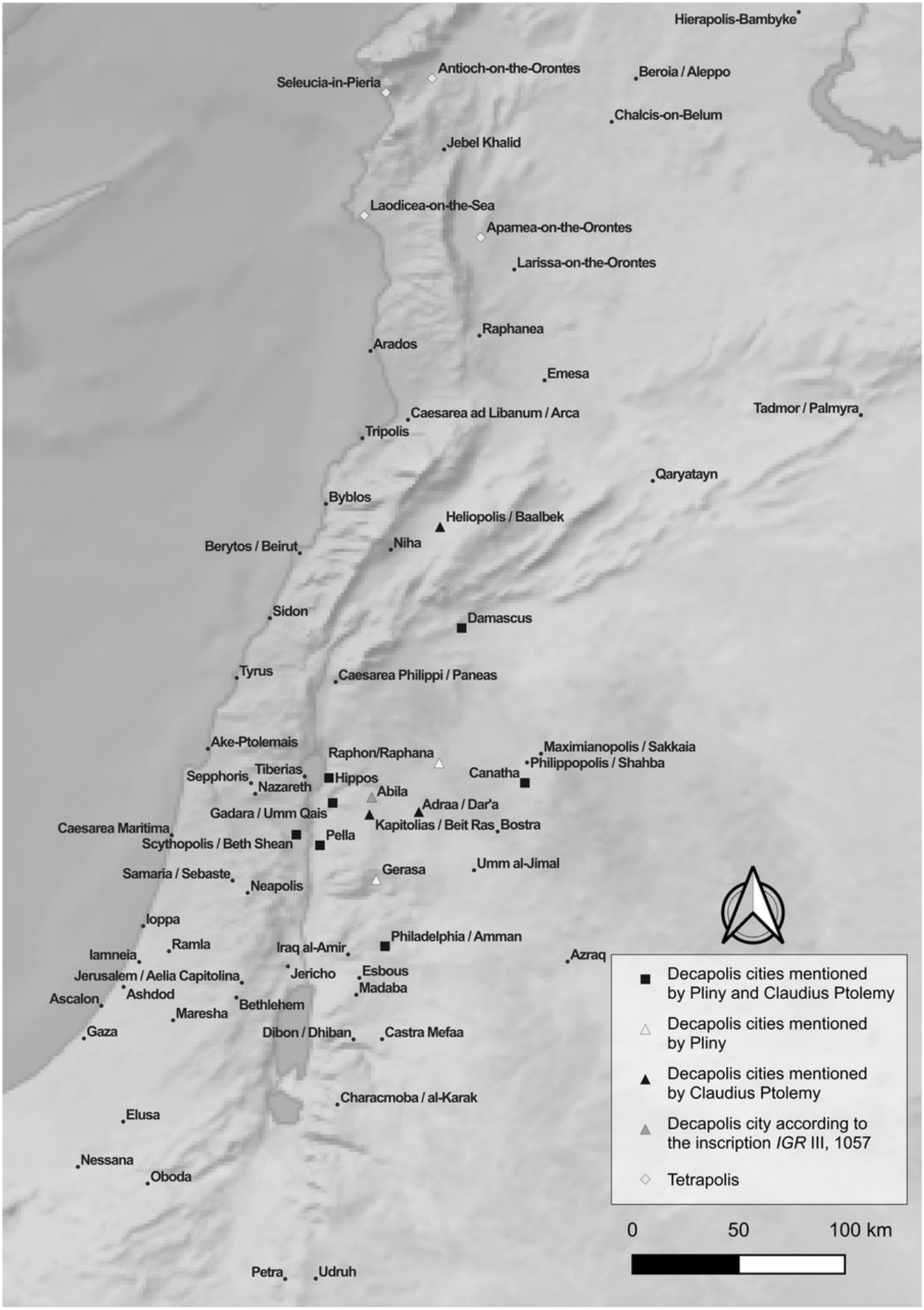
MAP 3. Roman Provinces, state in 44 **BC** (© Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after Map 1 in Van Wijlick, H. A. [2020]. *Rome and the Near Eastern Kingdoms and Principalities, 44–31 BC: A Study of Political Relations during Civil War*. Impact of Empire 38. Leiden: Brill).



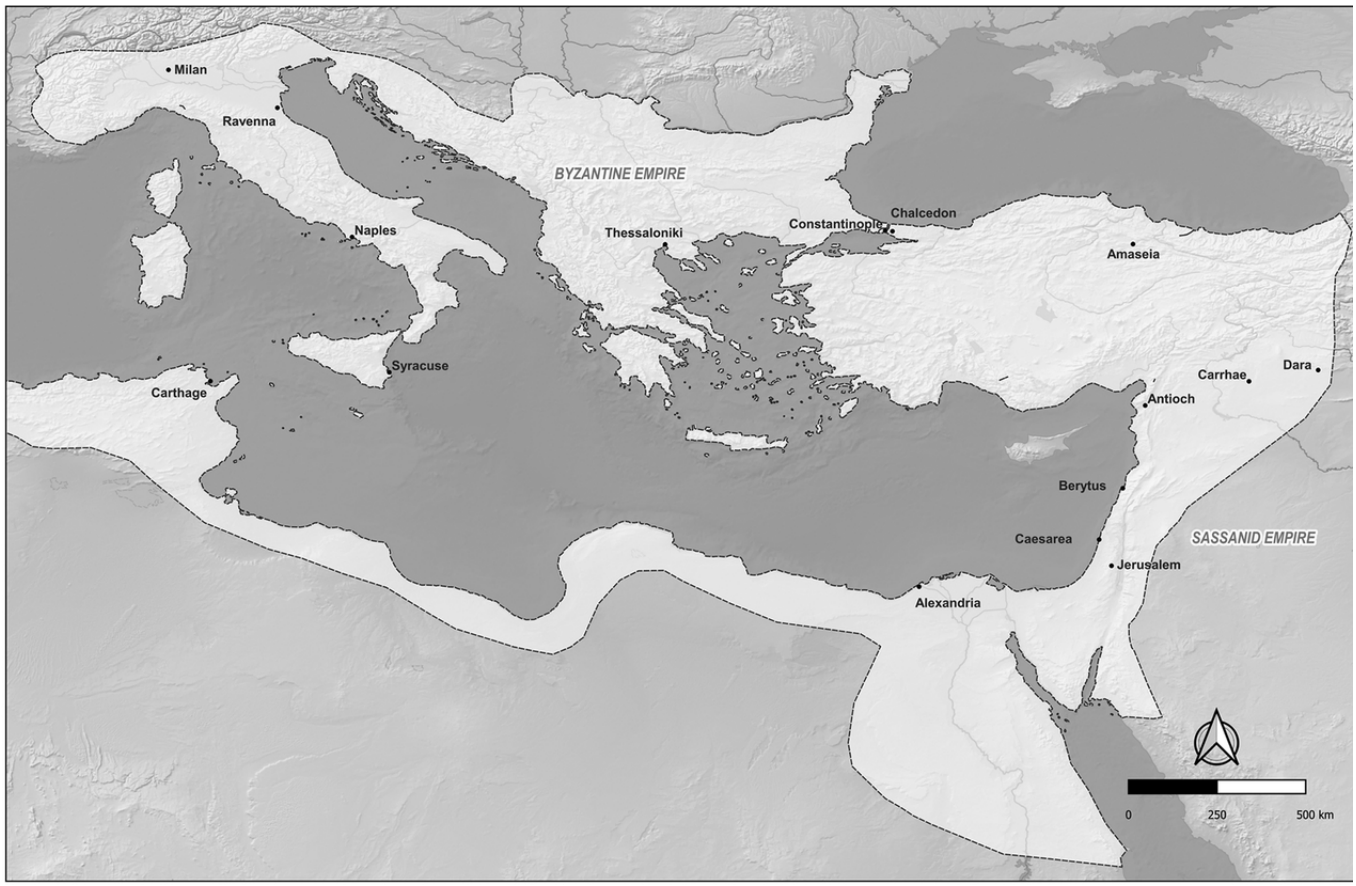
MAP 4. Roman Empire and the Empires of the Near East, c. **AD** 1–300 (© Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Roman provinces adapted after Pleiades [licensed under CC-BY 3.0], and with the rest of the shapefiles based on Map 10.1 in Bang, P. F., Bayly, C. A., and Scheidel, W., eds. [2020]. *The Oxford World History of Empire*. Vol.1, *The History of Empires*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).



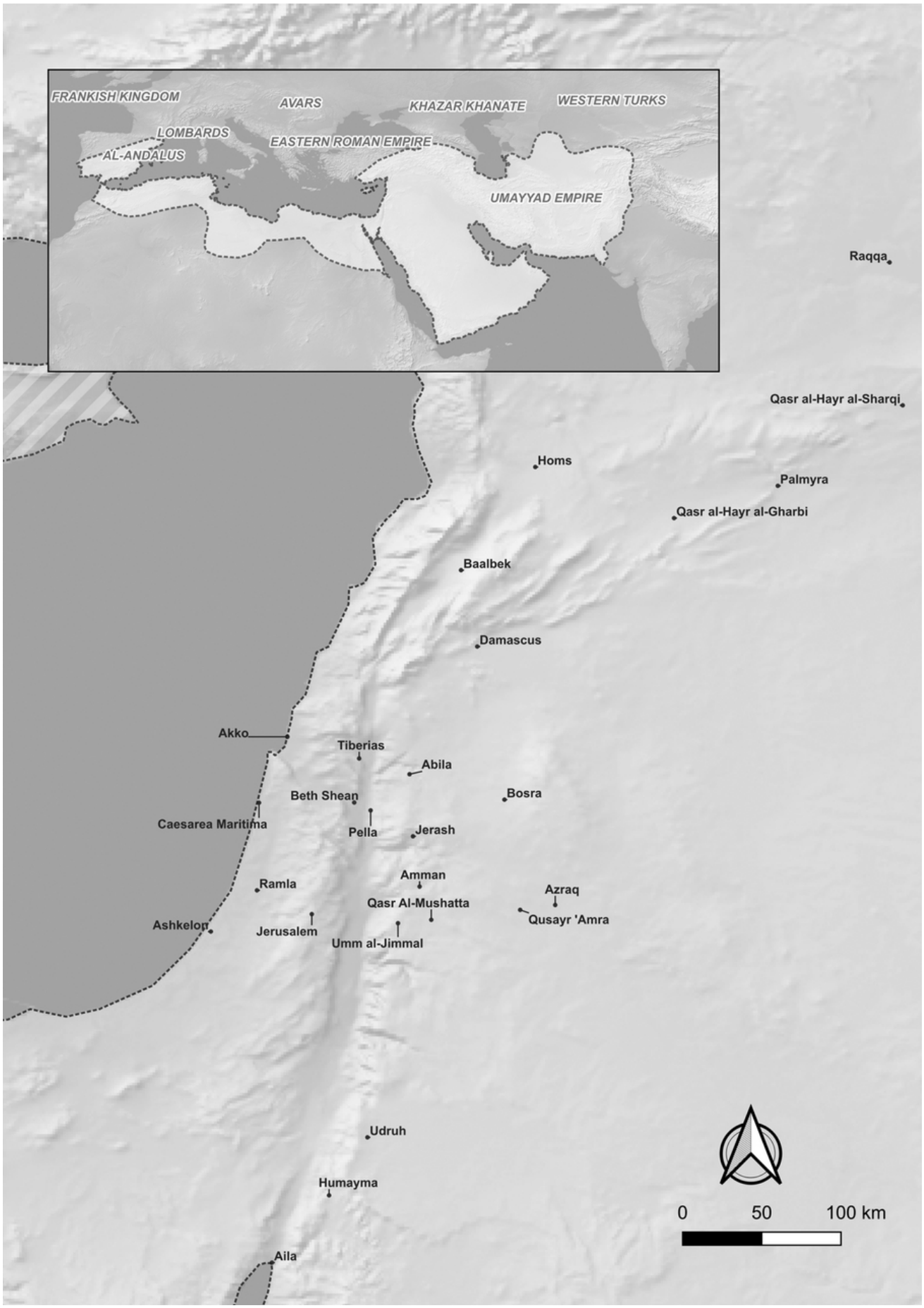
MAP 5. The cities of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East and the eastern Mediterranean (cities mentioned in the handbook) (© Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja).


Hierapolis-Bambyke
Antioch-on-the-Orontes
Seleucia-in-Pieria
Beroia / Aleppo
Chalcis-on-Belum
Jebel Khalid
Laodicea-on-the-Sea
Apamea-on-the-Orontes
Larissa-on-the-Orontes
Raphanea
Arados
Emesa
Caesarea ad Libanum / Arca
Tadmor / Palmyra
Tripolis
Qaryatayn
Byblos
Heliopolis / Baalbek
Berytos / Beirut
Niha
Sidon
Damascus
Tyrus
Caesarea Philippi / Paneas
Ake-Ptolemais
Raphon/Raphana
Maximianopolis / Sakkaia
Philippopolis / Shahba
Sepphoris
Tiberias
Hippos
Canatha
Nazareth
Abila
Adraa / Dar'a
Gadara / Umm Qais
Caesarea Maritima
Kapitolias / Beit Ras
Bostra
Pella
Scythopolis / Beth Shean
Gerasa
Umm al-Jimal
Samaria / Sebaste
Neapolis
Ioppa
Philadelphia / Amman
Ramla
Iraq al-Amir
Azraq
Iamneia
Jerusalem / Aelia Capitolina
Jericho
Esbous
Madaba
Ashdod
Ascalon
Bethlehem
Maresha
Gaza
Dibon / Dhiban
Castra Mefaa
Characmoba / al-Karak
Elusa
Nessana
Oboda
Petra
Udruh
Decapolis cities mentioned by Pliny and Claudius Ptolemy
Decapolis cities mentioned by Pliny
Decapolis cities mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy
Decapolis city according to the inscription IGR III, 1057
Tetrapolis
0
50
100 km

MAP 6. The cities of Hellenistic and Roman Syria (only cities mentioned in the handbook) (© Lilian Dibbern, Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja).



MAP 7. The Byzantine Empire under Justinian I, c. **AD** 525 (© Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after Map 1 of the Byzantine Empire in Morris, I. and Scheidel, W. [2009]. *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).


FRANKISH KINGDOM
AVARS
KHAZAR KHANATE
WESTERN TURKS
LOMBARDS
EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
AL-ANDALUS
UMAYYAD EMPIRE
Raqqa
Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi
Homs
Palmyra
Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi
Baalbek
Damascus
Akko
Tiberias
Abila
Beth Shean
Bosra
Caesarea Maritima
Pella
Jerash
Amman
Ramla
Azraq
Qasr Al-Mushatta
Qusayr 'Amra
Ashkelon
Jerusalem
Umm al-Jimmal
Udruh
Humayma
Aila
0
50
100 km

MAP 8. The extent of the Umayyad Empire, c. **AD** 740 (© Lilian Dibbern, Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after Figure 1.3 in Marsham, A., ed. [2020]. *The Umayyad World*. London: Routledge).

BACKGROUND CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1

THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN NEAR EAST

An Introduction

RUBINA RAJA

One of the most exciting and disputed, most conflict-ridden and damaged, most inspiring and intriguing regions in the world is the Near East—a term encompassing the modern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel/Palestine, eastern Turkey, Iraq, and parts of Saudi Arabia. The region has, for many obvious reasons—one of them being that it is home to the three Abrahamic world religions—attracted the attention of scholars for centuries (as examples of very early works on the region, see Wood 1753; 1757; Burckhardt 2011 [1822]; Robinson and Smith 1841; Musil 1907; 1927). The scholarship on the region is as diverse as its archaeology, history, and culture. It ranges chronologically from deep prehistory (Bar-Yosef 1980; Ahlström, Rollefson, and Edelman 1993) to modern times (Rosen 2021; Saidel and Erickson-Gini 2021) and thematically covers archaeology (Meyer 1997; Akkermans and Glenn 2003; Steiner and Kil lebrew 2014; Raja 2017), religion (Kaizer 2008; Raja and Rüpke 2015), and history (Liverani 2 014; Yapp 2014)—just to mention a few. The Near East is also a region in constant—and often dramatic—development and in which numerous global interests are concentrated. It is a region that has suffered greatly, including over the course of recent decades. However, it is also a region that holds an abundantly rich and diverse cultural heritage, one that belongs to the world as a whole and that is central to our understanding of it; it is a heritage we have not explored completely and do not understand to its fullest extent yet either.

Any piece of scholarship that deals with a region, a specific piece of land on a map, will grapple with its reasons for defining the region as it does. Any piece of scholarship that deals with a specific time frame will grapple with where exactly to put down the chronological borders of that period or periods. Historical events did not unfold with respect for artificial borders and periods that in fact were only invented later and often in the shadow of imperialism and colonization and external decisions about how definitions came into being (for the discussions and implications of this, see Pare 2008; Kotsonas 2016). Recent developments in the way global (pre-)history is being written as well as events in recent times are begging scholars to reassess our definitions of both the regions and the historical periodizations we adhere to (Osterhammel and Petersson 2005, 27–29; Kotsonas 2016). While these are debates worthy of lengthy discussions, I, nonetheless, still decided to entitle this book the *Handbook of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East*. This was done with open eyes, so to say, and with the knowledge that both the definitions of the periods as well as the regions in the title cannot be anything other than flawed. However, using different definitions would not have solved this problem. It is in fact very much with these problems in mind that the current handbook came into being and this also explains its content, which in a number of ways is different from other recently published handbooks that address the regions and periods under consideration here (Ahlström, Rollefson, and Edelman 1993; Meyer 1997; Butcher 2003; Bryce 2009; Steiner and Killebrew 2014; Seland 2021; Kaizer 2022). The region in question goes by many names: the Near East, the Middle East, the Levant, the Orient, or Western Asia just to mention the most common ones. All of these carry the imprint of the Western viewer, of

Western culture's influence on the way scholarship on the region has been shaped (see Glock 1995; Larsen 2005). We cannot deny this, and we cannot ignore it, either. Chronologically, the handbook covers the time from the late fourth century bc, the Hellenistic period, traditionally defined as beginning with the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon in 323 bc (Martin 2013, 198) until the middle of the eighth century ad, defined by the transition from the Umayyad Empire to that of the Abbasids, who moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad (Bessard 2020; Walker 2020, 56). One can question why a handbook with *Roman* as the latest chronological period in the title includes chapters going beyond the fourth century ad. However, in this context I have chosen to include several chapters on the late antique and early Islamic periods, since these must be viewed in a *longue durée* perspective and continuities as well as changes must be investigated in connection to the developments of the earlier periods (for examples of this, see Lichtenberger and Raja 2018; Lichtenberger et al. 2021; Romanowska et al. 2021; Giorgi and Eger 2021). While one can criticize such a choice, I am convinced that new approaches, new research, and new lines of enquiry will come into being from viewing the time frame in a more inclusive way. Yet it is obvious that the labels Hellenistic and Roman in many ways are artificial. In this context, however, they are to be seen as useful labels in the light of a strong tradition of earlier scholarship. I cannot claim this to be a handbook, however, of the late antique and early Islamic Near East and therefore this is not reflected in the title (for regionally relevant works on the later periods, see Eger 2014; Walker, Insoll, and Fenwick 2020; Bessard 2020). The approach to the regions geographically included in this handbook has been to also include the areas around what is usually considered the core of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. This has been done, since all too often we tend not to integrate the evidence from these highly connected areas and one of the future paths for pushing the borders of research is precisely to transcend these artificial borders as well. Therefore, a set of chapters on the Parthian and Sassanian Empires, their history, and material culture have also been included and authors asked to reflect on the connections to the core Hellenistic and Roman regions (see chapters 9, 10, 22, 32, 34, and 49).

Over the last two decades, much new research has been published on the regions and periods in focus here (Butcher 2003; Blömer, Facula, and Winter 2009; Raja 2012; Kropp 2013; Andrade 2013; Ball 2016; Lichtenberger and Raja 2021). Much of this is available in archaeological publications, excavation reports, and final publications, as well as in regional and chronological synthetical works including archaeological and historical sources, but often not, for obvious reasons comprehensive (e.g., Adams 2008; Rollefson, Schmidt, and Schick 2022). However, no synthetic overview of the entire region and entire period has been undertaken lately. The monumental standard works by both Millar (1993) and Sartre (2005) still remain the ones to be consulted for large-scale interpretive works. While these two monographs changed the field, they have also shown the room for different interpretations of much of the same evidence, since in places they disagree on interpretations of the ways the region developed in the transitional time between the end of the Hellenistic kingdoms and the implementation of Roman rule and on the imprints left by the Hellenistic heritage or lack thereof. Their narratives could today be refined in the light of new evidence, but no one has undertaken this daunting task yet, since the explosion of new literature, new archaeological and epigraphic evidence, as well as the lack of publication of other evidence, presents us with numerous challenges in even beginning to think through such a new and refined narrative. It is the intention with this handbook that new evidence is forefronted, hopefully giving impetus to new research on the region and periods. One other handbook must be singled out: that edited by Ted Kaizer published in 2022, the Blackwell *Companion to the Hellenistic and Roman*

Near East. Kaizer kindly shared the table of contents with me when I embarked on the current project, and therefore I could ensure that the current handbook would not so much reproduce as complement and expand on what is included in the 2022 handbook. Of course, there are several chapters on some of the same topics, since the current handbook must also be able to stand alone. However, emphasis has been put on making this a handbook in its own right and which goes beyond the topics, both regionally and chronologically that are covered in Kaizer's handbook. In that way these two handbooks show the wide array of approaches currently available in scholarship on the Hellenistic and Roman Near East.

One way in which this handbook is intended to distinguish itself from other handbooks and recent works on the region is through its inclusive approach to the time frame. We are dealing with fluid chronological borders of the periods under scrutiny, and often the quite artificial take on period divisions has hampered the ways in which research can develop. Archaeological and historical disciplines have even been named on the basis of periods, i.e., classical archaeology, Islamic archaeology, which from the outset limits such disciplines in their development and the material they tend to include. Of course, there have been attempts at bridging and extending these rigid categorizations (e.g., Altekamp, Hofter, and Krumme 2001; Lichtenberger and Raja 2017), but more can be done on that front and the handbook is therefore also intended as inspiration for university teachers and students alike.

Overall, the handbook also takes a double-sided approach in which both the local and the global perspective are taken into account—in some cases more than in others—often due to the nature of the evidence. While this is one of the ambitious aims of the handbook, it is not an easy one, since it demands more than is usually asked of authors, who have been pushed to go beyond their chronological and sometimes geographical comfort zones. However, I am convinced that only through such an approach might we begin to break new ground to pave the next decades of research. What we need are refined and high-definition narratives of both micro-, meso-, and macro-histories of the region and this handbook aims to offer openings to some of these on the basis of the most recent research undertaken.

A last point in the agenda of the handbook is to show the diversity and relevance of the disciplines of ancient history, classics, classical, near eastern and Islamic archaeology as well as epigraphic studies to both broader academia as such, but also much more broadly in the wider world. These are not disciplines we can do away with, but disciplines that offer expert knowledge that often feed straight into highly relevant topics in today's world, such as religious strife, political and geopolitical developments, language and communication, and artistic traditions. The book has been put together to also showcase this diversity and relevance through research-based chapters.

In the current handbook, attention has been given to bringing new sources to the forefront and to reevaluating the old ones in the light of these. Furthermore, a mix of archaeological, historical, epigraphic, and numismatic contributions make up the fifty chapters in the book. Often chapters will not be either exclusively archaeologically or historically anchored but will attempt to integrate sources, and through such an integration to bring new aspects of narratives, which we tend to understand as well known, to the forefront. The handbook is intended to be of use to both experts and students as well as the interested reader, and it presents up-to-date and current scholarship written by experts in the various fields.

It is divided into a set of four overarching topics: background chapters, visual arts and coinage, archaeological and historical sources, and regions and places. Several chapters can with advantage be read as sets and interrelate, but they are at the same time presented as separate introductions to their specific topics and therefore there will be slight overlaps in some literature, historical dates, and mentions of locations. The background chapters (chapter

s 2–4) give sweeping overviews of the development of the fields in the last decades and analyze a variety of evidence from the region. Taking both the local and the global into consideration, Engels and Versluys in two different ways tackle the region bottom-up and top-down, while Seland from a global history perspective embeds the region within its climate and geographical history.

A set of chapters that specifically deal with art and coinage from the Hellenistic period to the end of the Umayyad period follows (chapters 5–11). These chapters are divided, on the one hand, by chronology (Hellenistic to Roman; chapters 5–8) and, on the other hand, by the political division of the region at a given point in time (Parthian Empire, Sasanian Empire, and Umayyad Syria; chapters 9–11). They provide the overall material culture background for the wide range of chapters in the following sections and they forefront the rich visual culture of these regions and their interactions with regions beyond their own cultural and political realms.

Chapters 12–25 focus on a mix of archaeological and historical sources, including epigraphic sources; they are divided into themes and topics that do not necessarily connect to one place or region within the Near East but are meant to cover developments in the entire region where relevant. Some topics are quite specific, such as the ones handled in chapters 13–18. While others, chapters 12, 19–25, have broad sweeping titles, focusing on Hellenistic and Roman imperial rule in the region as well as the Parthian Empire and religion in the region including the introduction of Christianity and its development.

Chapters 26–50 focus on regions and places. These make up a substantial part of the book, since it is from these regions and locations that cultural, economic, political, religious, and social history must be written. They provide culture from the ground since they hold the empirical evidence. Therefore, a strong set of chapters laying out and discussing the ways in which these regions developed over time, the state of the evidence, as well as the forefronting of the newest evidence emerging from the location is a must.

This handbook has been put together during years when classical disciplines, such as ancient history, classics, and classical archaeology, have come under scrutiny from the wider world as well as in universities. There has been a strong push to renew the disciplines and to look critically at their roots and historiographic developments in order to move forward. I will dare to claim that this push sometimes has been done without entirely contextualizing and understanding the disciplines within their wider societal settings and historiographic contexts, while at the same time there is no doubt that these disciplines in some places must open themselves up not so much to justify their existence but rather to forefront their relevance in our modern world. However, it is important that such processes are undertaken with respect and insight and also through an inclusive approach. This is still an ongoing process and the execution will differ very much in terms of scope and impact from country to country, from academic tradition to academic tradition. This handbook in some ways reflects this development in the way the topics have been framed and scholars have been invited to write them. The handbook includes a wide range of diversity in the approaches applied and conclusions drawn and has also aimed to include both junior and senior researchers from a wide range of backgrounds while paying attention to the gender balance of authors. This could be seen as irrelevant in a handbook, but it is not: only through insisting on diversity and inclusion do we move forward in the ways in which we can see the past and therefore work usefully with it in future debates. I hope this handbook will be a contribution to the development of the disciplines included in it and can inspire students and junior researchers to take up the challenges that lie ahead of us in these fields; I also hope it will make senior researchers think differently about some of their approaches that influence the field currently.

Acknowledgments

The conceptualisation of the book as a whole and research in a variety of the book's chapters (1, 7, 9, 13, 14, 17, 26, 35, and 43) was supported by the DNRF119 grant for Centre for Urban Network Evolutions, as well as the Augustinus and Carlsberg Foundations. I would like to thank Stefan Vranka for commissioning this project for Oxford University Press and his patience with the process. I would also like to thank all the authors for working with me on this project and sticking to the topics they were assigned, and patiently waiting for it to be brought to completion. I thank Christina Levisen, Sine Saxkjær and Tim Barnwell for hand-holding much of the editorial process in various stages and a thank you also goes to research assistant Katarína Mokránová for helping with collecting literature and developing the maps together with me.

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CHAPTER 2

THE HELLENISTIC NEAR EAST

A Dynamic Canvas

DAVID ENGELS

Introduction

After the Hellenistic conquest, Syria, hitherto a territory situated on the margins of the Near Eastern kingdoms, became the powerhouse of the Mediterranean and one of the major gravitational points first of the Seleukid, then the Roman and Byzantine, and finally the ʾUmmayad Empires, before becoming, after the decline of the ʿAbbasids, an object of contention rather than domination again (general introduction in Sartre 2001; Bryce 2014).

This evolution was due to a series of reasons. First, we may refer to geography: situated at the north–south crossroad between Africa and Eurasia, and the west–east crossroad between the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Syria had (and has) immense strategic potential. Furthermore, the land itself: characterized by the abrupt encounter between the Great Arabian Desert; the fertile valleys of the Orontes, the Hauran, and the Jordan; and the coastal climate of the Mediterranean, Syria offers an astonishing micro-climate capable of sustaining most diverse forms of economy. And finally, the people: the close contact between nomadism and sedentism and the intermingling of Egyptian, Phoenician, Judaean, Arab, Aramean, Hittite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Iranian, Greek, and finally Roman traditions and peoples have contributed to the emergence of a true laboratory of civilizations. Nonetheless, the major reason for Syria's transformation from a transitional zone into a heartland of the Graeco-Roman Empire was due less to a slow evolution than to a unique political act: the decision by Seleukos I to transform northern Syria into the western heartland of his empire, followed by his successors' determination to politically unify the entire Levant under their rule.

In the following, we will try to place this decision into its larger context by first sketching the origins of the numerous political entities emerging in the Levant before and during the Achaimenid period (2). After reviewing the impact of Alexander's expedition (3), we will assess the reshaping of northern Syria, the "Seleukis," by the Seleukids, and of southern, "Koile" Syria by the Ptolemies as well as their nearly incessant conflicts (4). Then, we will describe the establishment of Seleukid rule over southern Syria in the aftermath of the Fifth Syrian War and follow the slow disintegration of Seleukid power in the wake of the growing influence of Rome, Armenia, and Parthia (5). Finally, we will analyze the integration of Syria into the Roman Empire (6), before proposing some conclusive remarks on the *longue durée* of Syrian history (7).

The Origins

Before the Neo-Assyrian conquest, which first unified the Levant under one central government, Syria was divided into several city-states whose fortifications sometimes go back

to 7000 BC (Jericho) or 6000 (Ugarit), but whose history is very difficult to reconstruct. During the second millennium, the fate of these cities seems to have been tightly linked to the destiny of their powerful neighbors, the Egyptian Middle (2137–1781) and New Empire (1550–1070) in the south, the Hittite Empire in the north (1600–1178), and the Mitanni (1500–1300) and Middle Assyrian Empire (1400–1100) in the east. During this period, north Syria was dominated by the Amorites and saw the rise and fall of settlements such as Ebla, Mari, and Ugarit, whereas the south, controlled by Egypt, was home to the Kanaanites (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Van de Mieroop 2006; Aruz, Graff, and Rakic 2013).

The Late Bronze Age Collapse of the twelfth century led to the destruction of many cities and saw a notable reconfiguration. In the south, the formation of the people of Israel as a community centered around the cult of YHWH led to the genesis of the states of Judah and of Samaria (Golden 2004; Grabbe 2008), while the coast became partly dominated by the Philistines, remnants of the "Sea Peoples" (Ehrlich 1996), and partly by the Canaanites who founded coastal cities such as Tyros, Byblos, and Sidon and became known as the Phoenicians (Aubet 2001; Elayi 2013). In middle and upper Syria, the political landscape became dominated by the Aramean tribes which seem to have superseded the Amorites and were responsible for the founding of many states such as Damaskos Aram and the Aramaization of many north Syrian Hittite cities and the territories situated between the upper Euphrates and Tigris (Briquel-Chatonnet 2004; Niehl 2014).

Whereas the late Bronze Age transformation of the Levant (Drews 1995; Cline 2014) was generally accompanied by severe social and political unrest, provoking even the decline of the Egyptian New Kingdom (1550–1070) and the fragmentation of the Hittite kingdom, the Middle Assyrian Empire remained largely unaffected and, though it retracted significantly from Syria, avoided the worst. This made possible the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (883–612), which, from the ninth century, annexed first north, then south Syria, and finally, under Asarhaddon (680–669), Egypt, creating thus for the first time a continuous domain from Memphis to Babylon. However, though known for its brutal warfare and its use of mass deportation to weaken resistance, the Assyrian Empire initially by no means abolished local political structures, but generally confirmed the rulers of subjected cities if they submitted to the new rule, and only gradually increased its administrative hold. This happened mostly in north Syria, where local dynasties were slowly replaced by administrators sent by the Assyrians, and populations shifted and mixed, whereas the south remained more independent (Cogan 1974; Liverani 1995; Fales 2001).

Though the Neo-Assyrian Empire soon collapsed after its greatest extent (Nineveh fell in 612), its heir, the Neo-Babylonian Empire (625–539), maintained its sway over Syria and was responsible, in retaliation for the Judaeo-Egyptian alliance, for the 586 destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of many Jews to Babylonia (Albertz 2003). Similarly, the Achaimenid conquest of the east (Babylon fell in 539) was only to bring a change in dynasty, not in status: the Babylonian Empire was transformed into the satrapy of Abr-Nahara (Leuze 1 935; Rainey 1969; Klinkott 2005 s.v.) and remained a largely self-administrating entity within the Persian Empire whose ruler presented himself as rightful "king of Babylon" (Boiy 2004; Bid mead 2004; Fried 2004).

The Achaimenid period witnessed a series of major evolutions. First, the return of the Judaeans to Jerusalem (539) and the foundation of a new temple. The experience of the captivity and the interaction with Zoroastrianism transformed the previously largely henotheistic belief of the Jewish people and fueled not only the resistance of Judaism toward all foreign interference with its cult, but ultimately also encouraged the rise of Christianity. During Achaimenid rule, Judaea and Samaria enjoyed great internal autonomy, remained loyal

subjects to the Persian kings (Stern 1984; Eph'al 1988; Bedford 2000; Lipinski 2009), and provided them with mercenaries (attested, e.g., at the Egyptian–Nubian frontier: Porten 1968; 1996).

Another Syrian region that benefited from the rise of the Achaimenids was Phoenicia, whose city-states became the major trading posts between the Mediterranean and the East. While preserving their autonomy (dominated by a merchant aristocracy and a ceremonial kingship), they entered into a generally peaceful symbiosis with their overlords and provided the fleets guaranteeing Achaimenid maritime hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean (Elayi 1980; Jigoulov 2014).

Whereas the relations between the Achaimenids and the Arab tribes roaming between Egypt and the Euphrates are difficult to define, but seem not to have been overly conflictual (Briant 1982), northern Syria remained somewhat in retreat. The absence of a suitable urban infrastructure and the difficult coast would have made its systematic development a costly undertaking which, given Achaimenid control over Phoenicia and its focus on the "Royal Road" from Susa to Sardeis as the empire's backbone, was not considered a priority (Sartre 1989).

As a general observation, we have thus to underline the Persian success in creating a reassuring continuity (Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger 2003) with previous political structures and conceding maximum autonomy to local elites as long as their ambitions did not collide with the great king's (Root 1979; 1996). This does not imply the Persians were absent from the political or cultural landscape of the Levant of the sixth–fourth centuries. One strong marker of royal presence was the local satrap. Whereas this Achaimenid official first simply took over the duties of demised rulers of states such as Babylonia, Lydia, or Egypt, the subsequent decades saw an increase in the satrapies' number and uniformity (Petit 1990; Klinkott 2005). Thus, it was probably the 482 Babylonian revolt that triggered the upgrade of the Levant into an independent satrapy administered from Sidon (or Damaskos) and thus becoming an autonomous unified administrative entity for the first time (Stolper 1989). Another means to increase the empire's cohesion was the satraps' conscious imitation of the Achaimenid royal capitals and courts, using the exchange of unequal gifts as a major means of communication with their subjects and popularizing the specific blend of the empire's different cultures engineered by the new Achaemenid art (Klinkott 2008; Llewellyn-Jones 2013). A further means of ensuring control was the use of military colonization. Significant numbers of Iranian soldiers living off land allocated by the king are attested in Babylonia, Egypt, Asia Minor (Sekunda 1985; 1988; 1991), and probably also Syria, where the Seleukids involved a significant Iranian diaspora in their own colonization. Finally, let us stress the importance of sanctuaries dedicated to the holy fire venerated by the Mazdaeansin providing a certain imperial religious framework, attested not only in Asia Minor, but also in northern Syria (Engels and Grigolin 2018).

Toward its end, the centrifugal tendencies of the Achaimenid Empire, stemming from its very feudal structure (Engels 2017, 23–40), made themselves strongly felt also in the Levant and resulted in the 360 Great Satrap's Revolt (Weiskopf 1989) and the 349 Phoenician rebellion, leading to the short-lived fusion of the satrapy of Abr-Nahari with the satrapy of Kilikia under Mazaios (Bing 1998).

Alexander's Conquest

When Alexander launched his expedition to the East, probably first intended as a mere means of consolidating the Macedonian hegemony over Greece and extending it into Ionia, he

assailed an already destabilized empire. His rapid conquest of Asia Minor, confirmed by the 333 victory of Issos, led him to the doorstep of the Levant. Instead of gambling on a risky offensive toward Babylonia, Alexander decided to target Phoenicia and its fleet to cut off the Persians from Palestine and Egypt. While northern Phoenicia, Samaria, and Judaea peacefully submitted to Alexander in 332, Tyros and Gaza became major obstacles and triggered a long siege resulting in the enslavement of the cities' population. After the annexation of Egypt in 332/331 (only reclaimed by the Persians in 341 after a difficult war), Alexander again traversed the Levant in 331, crossed the Euphrates at Thapsakos and invaded Assyria, where the Battle of Gaugamela sealed the fate of the Achaimenids.

Though Alexander's rule came to an abrupt end in 323 when the Macedonian king and "last of the Achaimenids" (Briant 1984, 88) died in Babylon, his conquest's impact was enormous. Alexander not only triggered the Hellenization of the Levant which, in some ways, ended only with the elimination of its last major Christian communities in recent years; he also became the semi-mythical origin of many local traditions redefining the everyday life of its inhabitants for centuries.

Alexander was credited with the foundation of a bewildering number of colonies (Tcherikover 1927; Billows 1995). Syria was no exception, though except for some selected cities such as Issos, many of these traditions rather refer to small garrisons or are even outright inventions. By referring their foundations to Alexander and not the Ptolemies or Seleukids, many cities constructed a civic identity independent from their respective overlords while idealizing Alexander's rule as a synonym for a near-utopian coexistence of the most diverse people and traditions (Engels 2017, 103–156).

For indeed, Alexander was also considered by many autochthonous people as having had a unique interest in their own particular traditions, a vision based on Alexander's actual wish to respect existing frameworks but quickly developing a life of its own. Thus, Alexander was considered the offspring of the pharaohs, legitimate king of Babylonia, and descendant of the Achaimenids (Koenen 1985; Hornig 2012; Stoneman, Erickson, and Netton 2012); the Jews thought his entire expedition was due to a dream sent by JHWH and claimed he sacrificed in the temple and granted the Jewish people autonomy (Goldstein 1993)—all showing how Alexander became an ideal king regularly invoked during negotiations over local elites' regional autonomy.

Hellenization and the Rise of a Syrian Identity

Alexander's death in 323 triggered the long Diadoch Wars, lasting, from a Syrian perspective, until the 301 Battle of Ipsos, when, after Andigonos's defeat, the bulk of the empire became divided up between Ptolemy, Seleukos, and Lysimachos (Anson 2014). Despite an (alleged) agreement attributing the entirety of Syria, the center of Antigonos's domain, to Seleukos I, Ptolemy I annexed its southern part, thus triggering the numerous Syrian Wars between the two major Hellenistic dynasties. Seleukos continued many of Antigonos's plans for Syria. During his short hegemony, Antigonos (Engel 1976; Billows 1990) had realized that the north of Syria, hitherto of only secondary strategic importance, could become a pivotal element in the construction of Graeco-Macedonian rule (Engels 2017, 485–515). Like most subsequent Hellenistic rulers over the Near East, he was dependent on secure maritime connections between the empire's economic heartland, Mesopotamia, and the Greek homeland, as only a steady flow of settlers, mercenaries, and technicians could maintain the rule of the tiny Graeco-Macedonian elite over the vast East. Northern Syria was not only the nearest maritime

access point to Mesopotamia, but it also was situated where the "Royal Road" from Asia Minor to Iran bifurcated toward Egypt. Antigonos thus launched a major program of colonization based on the new city of Antigoneia (near to the future Antiocheia) and a series of secondary settlements such as Pella (the future Apameia) (Tcherikover 1927; Cohen 2006; Engels and Grigolin 2018).

Though the Seleukid conquest of Mesopotamia, Iran, and finally the Levant by Seleukos I was accompanied by the introduction of a new chronological era starting in 312 (a chronological revolution: Kosmin 2018), the transition from Achaimenid to Seleukid power was generally characterized by continuity instead of rupture (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993; Engels 2018). The situation in north Syria, however, was particular, as the Seleukids had far greater freedom of action here than elsewhere and dramatically refashioned the area, improving upon Antigonos's projects.

The foundation of the Tetrapolis of Seleukeia, Antiocheia, Apameia, and Laodikeia (Downey 1961; Grainger 1990; Cohen 2006; Engels 2017, 409–454) conveyed not only a strong message of dynastic cohesion, immortalizing the present ruler, his father (and son) Antiochos, his mother Laodike, and his Iranian wife Apama. It also imposed an impressive and hitherto unknown large-scale urban structure on the entire northern Levant, enhanced through many roads, harbors, and secondary settlements. Hence, Seleukeia and Laodikeia provided two new maritime access points to Syria, Apameia became a major military hub, and Antiocheia was now one of the capitals of the empire in tandem with Seleukeia-Tigris. The colonization program of what was now proudly called the "Seleukis" seems to have followed a pattern developed when Seleukos implemented his rule over the east and consisted in a conscious fusion of populations and cultural symbols similar to the Achaimenid endeavors, though dominated by Graeco-Macedonian, not Iranian features (Cohen 1978; 2006). Thus, the new colonies, organized as Greek *poleis* (Bickermann 1938; Capdetrey 2007; Kosmin 2014), seem to have comprised not only Greek and Macedonian but also local Syrian, Jewish, and Iranian settlers (Engels 2018, 157–212). They even boasted fire sanctuaries (Engels 2017, 213–244; Engels and Grigolin 2018) and thus did not simply reflect Greek domination but also the peaceful coexistence of the empire's numerous cultures. Accompanied by a vast program of monetarization (de Callatay and Aperghis 2004; Le Rider and de Callatay 2006) and international exchange, the new cities rapidly grew (Antioch being inhabited, in the late Hellenistic period, by roughly 300,000 people) and saw the rise of an increasingly self-conscious civic elite.

While Seleukos and his successors thus transformed north Syria from a somewhat peripheral region into a major Mediterranean economic center, the Ptolemaic impact on south (Koile) Syria was less grand, though not less important. The Ptolemies endeavored far less to artificially Hellenize or homogenize their empire (Bingen 2007; Pfeiffer 2007; Manning 2010; Strootman 2014). While Alexandreia, the main exception to this rule, grew into a multicultural megapolis of half a million inhabitants, where Graeco-Macedonians cohabited (not always peacefully) with native Egyptians and an ever-growing Jewish community (Harris and Ruffini 2004), the rest of the country was only very carefully submitted to the requirements of the Hellenistic age. Similarly, in Syria, Graeco-Macedonian settlements, mostly military, remained sparse and small (Müller 2006; Cohen 2006), while the Phoenician cities, the temple-polity of Jerusalem, and even Samaria kept their distinct identities (Grainger 1991), their slow Hellenization being the fruit of cultural and commercial exchange rather than of a forced assimilation.

This leads to the question about the emergence of a proper Syrian "identity" (Andrade 2013). While in the south, the old identities continued to survive relatively unscathed during the

Ptolemaic (and, with the exception of Jerusalem, Seleukid) period, the north saw the emergence of vibrant, multiethnic cities, where adherence to Hellenistic "imperial" culture ceased to be a marker of Graeco-Macedonian ethnicity and became a synonym for the cosmopolite world-civilization called for by Stoic philosophers (Baldry 1965; Engels 2014). Nevertheless, Aramean by no means decreased in importance, but remained the lingua franca of the entire Levant, where it not only dominated the countryside from Kilikia to Judaea but also spread into the new Hellenistic settlements (Gzella and Folmer 2008; Gzella 2015), creating the rich bilingual culture of Roman and late antique times, when Aramean transformed into (Christian) Syriac which, in turn, became a major influence for the linguistically quite similar Arab.

Seleukid Hegemony and Disintegration

The first four Syrian Wars resulted only in minor territorial shifts between the Seleukid and the Ptolemaic dominions in south and north Syria, mostly around Damaskos (Grainger 2010). After the Fifth Syrian War (202–195) however, Antiochos III (r. 223–187) managed to annex Koile Syria (Schmitt 1964; Grainger 2015), which remained under Seleukid control also after the Sixth Syrian War fought under Antiochos IV. This shift had only limited consequences for Koile Syria at first, as the newly won territories continued to enjoy similar rights as under the Ptolemies (Gauger 1990; Rajak 2007), the real impact being on domestic policies, where pro-Ptolemaic factions were supplanted by pro-Seleukid ones. However, the 190 Seleukid defeat at Magnesia against the Romans, resulting in the loss of Asia Minor and huge war indemnities, and the gradual loss of Baktria and the rise of the Parthians showed the need to reform the Seleukid state, an endeavor mainly realized by Antiochus IV (r. 175–164: Mittag 2006; Feyel and Graslin 2014). First on the list was the homogenization of the empire through an accelerated Hellenization of native oriental towns, many of which were awarded a new status and a dynastic name. In some cases, the initiative seems to have originated with the local elites themselves, wanting to please the king, as in the case of Jerusalem whose priestly elite applied for the foundation of a polity of "Antiocheans" (Hellenized Jews) within the city of Jerusalem (Hengel 1976; Levine 1998; Engels 2017, 347–380). Internal political rivalries and the (false) news of the king's death during the Sixth Syrian War (170–168) triggered a change of power interpreted by the king as rebellion, which led toward an accelerated Hellenization of Judaea through what our sources present as an interdiction of essential features of the JHWH cult. This provoked the Maccabean revolt, a partisan war only ending in 134 with the recognition of Judaean autonomy and the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty (Fischer 1980; Bringmann 1983; Honigman 2014; Bernhardt 2015).

This war tied up Seleukid forces when all strength should have been diverted east, where the Parthians conquered Iran and menaced Babylonia, but this was not the only calamity: after the death of Antiochos IV in 164, civil war broke out between the two main dynastic lines and lasted, with some interruptions, for nearly a century, only ending with the empire's demise (Ehling 2007).

The consequences of this fratricidal war in conjunction with the Roman attempt to systematically weaken the Seleukids were numerous (Will 1972; Gruen 1976; Dreyer 2007). First, the inner strife resulted in a generalized economic crisis and growing independence of the cities and temple states, facilitated by the Seleukids' adoption of the Achaimenids' feudal model (Chrubasik 2016; Engels 2017, 23–40), as became most notorious with Antiochos III's reconfiguration of the empire's periphery (Schmitt 1964; Engels 2017, 307–346). As the

central power was either non-existent or weak and on a perpetual quest for money and support, the civic elites gradually enhanced their autonomy and, reclaiming ever growing rights such as *autonomia*, *demokratia*, *aphrouresia*, *asylia*, *aphorologesia*, often gained total political independence, *eleutheria*, generally celebrated by the introduction of a new civic era (Engels 2017, 409–454). This evolution not only affected the Phoenician coastal cities but also Seleukid foundations such as the Tetrapolis, where the Seleukid heritage was gradually downplayed in favor of alternative founding legends, referring back rather to classical myth and relegating the Seleukid dynasty to the role of one among numerous overlords (Engels and Grigolin 2018).

This centrifugal tendency also affected the numerous semi-autonomous princedoms situated on the margins between Asia Minor and the Fertile Crescent, where Kommagene, Sophene, Osrhoene, Adiabene, and Gordyene obtained a precarious independence between the rival empires (Sommer 2005).

At the same time, the lack of a central authority overthrew the balance between sedentary and nomadic people and resulted in the growing importance of Arab tribes as mercenaries, local patrons, city tyrants, or even kings (e.g., the Ituraeans in central and the Nabateans in southern Syria; Myers 2010), and it is difficult to ascertain whether their attempts to dominate agricultural regions were nascent states' endeavors to collect taxes or brigands' usual razzias (Fisher 2015).

Finally, the decline of the Seleukid and Ptolemaic navies resulted in a maritime power vacuum in the east and the rise of piracy (Ormerod 1924; Maróti 1962). The pirates seem to have also taken advantage of the Seleukid retreat from south Asia Minor, where they occupied well-protected harbors and raided the Levantine coasts in search of slaves to be sold at slave markets such as Delos and to satisfy Rome's constant need for servile labor. This explains not only the complacency with which the equestrian and senatorial elites treated the problem at first, but also why "Syrian" became a near-synonym for "slave"; an identification culminating in the Sicilian Slave Wars, where Eunous of Apameia was proclaimed king under the typically Seleukid name "Antiochos," claimed a special relationship with the Dea Syria, and called his subjects "Syrians" (Engels 2017, 383–408).

It is not surprising that the Tetrapolis gradually realized the need for a new stable supraregional government in front of the sextuple threat of Romans and pirates in the west, Parthians in the east, and Arabs, Hasmoneans, and Ituraeans in the south. As the Seleukid dynasty had hopelessly discredited itself, the people of Syria officially invited the Armenian king Tigranes II the Great (r. 95–55) in 83 to restore law and order, as he had hitherto not yet been involved in local disputes, had a long experience in administering a multiethnic empire, seemed a good counterweight against Romans and Parthians, and was expected to leave Syria sufficient autonomy, as his own power center was situated far north.

However, this calculus proved only partially correct. Armenian rule seems to have been much more oppressive than expected, as Tigranes moved his capital city from Artaxata to Tigranokerta, situated on the very border of the Fertile Crescent. Tigranes also started confrontations not only with the southern Syrian people but also with the Romans because of his alliance with Mithridates VI the Great (r. 120–63) and with the Parthians (Manandian 1963) in a period when all Near Eastern rulers seemed to aim at becoming "kings of kings" (Schäfer 1974; Engels 2017, 41–72). The war with the Romans led to the demise of the Armenian realm and left the cities of north Syria again without a patron, explaining why they finally appealed to the Romans.

Indeed, when Pompey the Great (106–48), after his resounding victories in Asia Minor, moved southward in order to create a vast network of client states and protect the new provinces from the Parthian Empire, the necessity of reordering the confused political conditions of the Levant drew him ever deeper into Syria (Wirth 1983; Sherwin-White 1994; Ehling 2007). He took the decision not to restore the Seleukid dynasty but to transform northern Syria into a new province; an unexpected move which, some sources claim, emanated from a Syrian delegation presenting Pompey with a substantial bribe. Pompey decided that most major cities in Syria and Phoenicia were to become *civitates liberae* allied to Rome on the basis of formal equality, while only the rural districts outside of the cities' territories became integral parts of the Roman Empire (Sartre 1991). However, Roman troops were stationed on the Euphrates, the Roman governor resided in Antioch, and significant indirect taxes were received by the Roman administration: the "liberty" of the Syrian cities was thus tightly embedded in the new imperial system. However, it seems that this solution, despite the usual complaints about the greed of some of the governors, was a success: the Syrian cities remained generally loyal to the Romans, and the latter guaranteed broad continuity with the institutions of their royal predecessors, even continuing to mint coins bearing the effigy of Philippos Philadelphos (r. ca. 94–83) (Burnett 2002).

After reordering the Tetrapolis, Pompey proceeded southward and redefined the respective territories' relationships with Rome until he arrived in Judaea where he became entangled in the Hasmonean civil war opposing Aristoboulos II to Johannes Hyrkanos II. After finally solving the dispute in favor of the latter after the siege of Jerusalem, where he penetrated even into the temple in order to demonstrate Roman power, Pompey abrogated the title of Jewish "kings," annexed Judaea as an autonomous, yet tributary temple state governed by a high priest to the new Syrian province (Burr 1972; Bellemore 1999; Shatzman 1999; Kallet-Marx 1995), but declared the independence (under Roman protection) of the numerous Hellenized cities previously conquered by the Hasmoneans and later subsumed as the "Decapolis" (Bietenhard 1977; Lichtenberger 2003; Engels 2014). After also signing a treaty with the Nabateans, the death of Mithridates VI ended Pompey's last formal reasons for staying in the East, and he returned to Rome leaving A. Gabinius in charge of Syria.

After a short period of stability, only affected by Aristoboulos II's attempt to regain power and the subsequent division of Judaea into five autonomous entities, the outbreak of Crassus's war against the Parthians in 54 and the subsequent civil wars in 49 once again created chaos in Syria. Our numismatic evidence makes it difficult to reconstruct the numerous shifts in alliance (Seyrig 1950; Engels 2017, 409–454) until Mark Antony and Cleopatra endeavored to restructure the Levant. The new order was not based on the old provincial system but rather on a restoration of traditional Hellenistic kingdoms, though all staffed by members of the Ptolemaic dynasty. While Cleopatra, co-ruling with her son Caesarion, remained sole sovereign of Egypt, Kypros, and Kyrenaica, and hegemon over the entire Near East as "queen of kings," her Ptolemaios Philadelphos ruled over Phoenicia, Syria, and Kilikia, while her son Alexander Helios was to rule over Armenia, Media, and the Parthian Empire (all yet to be conquered) (Schrapel 1996). It is difficult to assess whether this reordering is a fact or mere Augustan propaganda: on the one hand, the Roman provincial administration remained in charge of the Levant; on the other, Cleopatra considered King Herod not only as Rome's, but also as her personal client, and commissioned him to execute certain fiscal duties for her sake (Schalit 1969, 772–777 and Engels 2007). Indeed, after the partition of the Hasmonean kingdom, the

power vacuum in the Near East was used by Herod the Great, who conquered most of Judaea in 40–37 and was granted the title of king of Judaea by the senate; a title he managed to retain for nearly forty years until his death in 4 BC despite initially supporting Cleopatra and Mark Antony and not Octavian (Schalit 1969; Jacobson and Kokkinos 2009).

After the victory of Actium in 31, Octavian conquered Egypt, occupied Syria, and, after concluding peace with the Parthians, proceeded to a systematic reevaluation of the local situation (Sherwin-White 1984; Monson 2012). Broadly speaking, he reserved control over the north Levant, the core of the Provincia Syria, for himself by making it an imperial province submitted to his *imperium proconsulare* and governed by a legate (Sartre 1997; Dąbrowa 1998; Gebhardt 2002). Egypt was annexed to his own, private dominion, and henceforth administrated by an equestrian prefect (Jördens 2009; Riggs 2012). South Syria, however, was divided up into different polities: Herod's client kingdom of Judaea, gradually enlarged by Augustus; the Nabatean kingdom, in constant conflict with Herod and an uneasy peace with Rome (Negev 1977; Hackl, Jenni, and Schneider 2003); the Phoenician coastal cities, independent, but allied with Rome; and finally the Decapolis, a series of semi-autonomous Hellenized cities subjected to Herod but pining for autonomy.

At the same time, the *pax Augusta* launched an unprecedented period of economic welfare, manifest through an intense civic and sacred building program (Hoffmann-Salz 2011), fundamental for our reconstruction of the religious and cultural identities of the Syrian peoples (Raja 2012; Blömer, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2015). Everywhere in the Levant, even territories peripheral to Hellenization and scarcely interconnected with the Mediterranean developed an astonishing vitality, as becomes particularly obvious when considering the Auranitis, whose irrigation system was greatly dependent on order and stability, and where the *pax Romana* made possible a vast construction program transforming it into one of the Levant's granaries (Engels 2007).

Conclusion

One feature emerges as fundamental to the understanding of the Near East during the second half of the first millennium BC: the strange overlaying of continuity and rupture. Continuity, as the Achaimenids, Alexander, the Seleukids, the Ptolemies, and even the Romans endeavored to legitimate their claims over the Levant by respecting local traditions and looking for compromises with the local elites—a tactic reaching its limits only in the case of Judaism. Rupture, as, behind the appearance of continuity, at least Hellenistic rule with its infrastructural program profoundly transformed the Levant in a spectacular way: from a zone of transition, where only the Phoenician city-states emerged as major political actors, Syria, with its grid of Hellenistic cities and its function as major bottleneck for the communication between the Roman *Mare nostrum* and the Iranian realms, became the core of the eastern Mediterranean and not only one of the wealthiest provinces of the Roman, but also of the Byzantine and the 'Umayyad Empires. This evolution was not without incidents. Once Roman rule over the Levant was firmly established, Syria experienced a centuries-long period of political peace and economic prosperity, only rarely interrupted by incursions by the Parthians and the Sasanians. However, Syria was to become the battlefield of another fundamental battle: the political activation of messianism and apocalypticism. The roots of these movements reach back far in time and already inspired the Maccabean uprising before becoming the fertile ground on which Christianity emerged, fundamentally transforming the religious nature of the eastern Mediterranean, and enabling the Levant's later shift from a

Hellenized, polytheist, city-state culture toward a civilization dominated by an Arab-Syriac, monotheist, territorial-state paradigm.

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CHAPTER 3

EMBEDDING GLOBAL DIVERSITY IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN NEAR EAST

Setting the Agenda

MIGUEL JOHN VERSLUYS

Introduction: A History of Joining up

The history of ancient Syria and the Near East, in what we call the Hellenistic and Roman period, is one of continuity and change—as are all histories (Ghisleni 2018). However, particularly concerning these aspects, something special seems to occur during this period. Our sources testify to a progressive linkage of pre-existing local and regional networks of interaction within the Near East, on the one hand (Hodos 2017). On the other hand, they make clear that the exchange between the Near East and other regions within the Afro-Eurasian world is scaled up significantly, as well (Beaujard 2010). This overall intensification of connectivity, as we could call it, has a profound impact. It generates new technologies and new products but also new forms of religious behavior and new lifestyles, among many other innovations. The history of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, therefore, emphatically is a history of "joining up" (Purcell 2014, 65). The special character of this process for the Hellenistic and Roman periods, also in relation to earlier intensifications of connectivity in the region, is encapsulated well in a quote by Nicolas Purcell (2014, 72), who qualifies it as a "paroxysm of integration":

> Meanwhile, with the continuum of the ancient world, the play of intensification of production, mobility and exchange can increasingly, during the Hellenistic period, be seen in a crescendo which produced in the early Roman Empire a paroxysm of integration, whose nature is still a subject of debate, but whose quite exceptional scale, by pre-modern standards, becomes steadily clearer.

Purcell writes about the wider Mediterranean and hence about only part of the Near East. Recent research continues to make clear, however, that the qualification "paroxysm of integration" indeed looks apt for central Asia (Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Parthia, Bactria) as well, during this period (Hauser 2013; Hodos 2017; Mairs 2017; Hoo 2018; cf. Mairs 2020 for the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek world). Casting the net even wider still, some scholars would suggest that we are dealing with a global, Afro-Eurasian history of "joining up" in this period, spanning from the Atlantic to the Chinese Sea (Versluys, forthcoming: Beaujard 2010).

From *Inter*-cultural Connectivity to *Intra*-cultural Connectivity

The concept of globalization is now widely used among scholars of antiquity to study and better understand this quintessentially cosmopolitan world, as well as its cultural products (Jennings 2011; Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hodos et al. 2017; Versluys 2021; Autiero and Cobb 2022; Hoo 2022). It is proving to be a most fecund methodology, because it takes us away from

imagining the ancient world as consisting of distinct "cultural containers" (Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, etc.) with their various interactions. Rather, globalization invites us to take intense connectivity and multiculturalism as a point of departure for our analyses (Nederveen Pieterse 2009). Our interpretations thus shift from *inter*-cultural connectivity, with related acculturation questions of who influences whom and to what extent, toward *intra*-cultural connectivity, which regards all these cultural traditions as relative and fluid, while simultaneously and fundamentally being part of a single, Afro-Eurasian container (Versluys 2017; Pitts 2019; Hoo 2023). Intra-cultural connectivity still asks fundamental questions of connectedness and related issues of power and identity, but it focuses on its functioning; on understanding the frequency, strength, content, and directionality of the ties that hold this single world together (Knappett 2017). It frees us, therefore, from the zero-sum game that is implied by the approach of acculturation and is therefore much better suited to answer questions of continuity, change, power, and identity, as this chapter hopes to illustrate.

For the history and archaeology of ancient Syria and the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, this perspective is particularly worthwhile because it provides us with a totally different view on questions about the cultural character or identity of persons, socio-cultural, and religious phenomena, cities, regions, or even empires, which remain very influential in our field. It is still heavily debated, for instance, whether the Seleucid Empire was Greek *or* Oriental (Oetjen 2020); to what extent Palmyra and its religion was Roman *or* rather Parthian (Raja 2019); whether Susa remained Persian *or* became Hellenistic (Messina 2011); whether the content of the Borsippa cylinder is Babylonian *or* Seleucid (Stevens 2014); or to what extent religious developments in the period are determined by so-called Occidental *or* Oriental elements (Kaizer 2008).

Thinking with globalization demonstrates that these are the wrong questions to ask and that it is only logical that they are all those things at the very same time—and more. Globalization is not about homogenization but about the interaction between the local, regional, and global, and about how this continuous entanglement shapes societies. What we call globalization is as much constituted by the local as it is by the global as when the global is brought to the local level, the local becomes global simultaneously (Adams 2008; Sheikh 2017; Nederveen Pieterse 2020). Globalization is always *glocalization* and therefore inherently about simultaneous homogenization and diversification (Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hodos et al. 2017; Riedel 2018 for glocalization specifically). Using this perspective implies that understanding continuity, change, and identity is *not* about choosing either one or the other; it is *not* about trying to measure the degree to which people, objects, or socio-cultural phenomena belong to a specific cultural container. It is all Middle Ground, to refer to a now often-used concept for the field (cf. Bonnet 2015 after White 1991) and everything in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East is, therefore, a "hybrid," in one way or another. This should be our point of departure for further study, not a conclusion.

Embedding Global Diversity

Our research questions, therefore, should focus on the functioning of this global melting pot; the novelties generated by the interaction of the local, regional, and global elements that constitute it; the impact of globalization in terms of gains and losses; and perhaps in particular, it should focus on the historical consequences generated by it. Documenting networks and interactions is important but only a first, still rather empirical step in our interpretation of the

Hellenistic and Roman Near East, as our human planet is characterized by global interactions from its very beginnings. We should therefore simultaneously shift our attention from (1) documenting the network and these interactions themselves, toward (2) investigating how and why, in what particular way, people, groups, or cultures embed the global diversity they were confronted with while subsequently (3) studying the impact of their engagement with this global diversity in the short and the long run; inquiring what new cultural constellations it resulted in.

A first fundamental question for our discipline, in this respect, is the question of Hellenization —explicitly *not* understood in terms of content, as the spread of "Greek culture," but rather in terms of form, as Hellenism (Chrubasik and King 2017). Hellenism should be studied as a form of appropriation and entanglement (Dietler 2010; Hauser 2013; Aliquot and Bonnet 2015); as an interlocutor promoting intra-cultural dialogues (Invernizzi 2012; Hoo 2023); and as a new conceptual and material package full of disruptive energy (Feeney 2016), resulting in the evolving of regional traditions. A second fundamental question concerns a proper conceptualization of the process we call Romanization—explicitly *not* understood as the spread of Roman (versus Native) power and imperial culture. Rather, we should study it as the Mediterranean *cum* Asian stabilization of increased connectivity across two empires (Roman and Parthian), connecting the Afro-Eurasian sphere and resulting in an unprecedented object boom and its consumer revolution (Versluys 2014; Pitts and Versluys 2020; Versluys, forthcoming). The Hellenistic and Roman Near East is characterized by these two (overlapping) forms of embedding global diversity, resulting in the creation of something new that is more than the sum of the constituent parts.

The Structure of the Argument

The joining up of the Hellenistic and Roman periods is the result of increasing connectivity over time and its effects. First, Near Eastern connectivity will be described from a *longue durée* perspective to better situate the "paroxysm of integration" of the Hellenistic and Roman period. One of these effects was the "disembedding" of all kinds of (socio-cultural and religious) elements. Through increasing connectivity, these elements moved from a concrete, tangible, and local context to a more abstract or global level (Hylland Eriksen 2014, ch. 1). Things that we call Greek or Babylonian or Persian (etc.) in the Hellenistic and Roman period had already traveled widely in earlier centuries, thereby often changing in meaning. By being used in different contexts, they often lost their geographical and cultural specificity. They were "unmarked" from their origin, so to speak, as they were appropriated and made to work in these different contexts for different reasons and purposes (Versluys 2015).

FIGURE 3.1. The main sites discussed in this chapter (Emesa/Tell Abū Sābūn, ʿIraq al Amir, and Commagene) in their Near Eastern as well as Afro-Eurasian context (map by Joanne Porck).

In characterizing these elements for our period, therefore, we should in fact always put geographical, ethnic, or cultural denotations between inverted commas and talk about "Greek" or "Babylonian" or "Persian" (etc.) elements—and then explain what we mean by those terms. Subsequently, three case studies from various regions and spanning from 200 bc to ad 100 are presented to illustrate what embedding global diversity can entail (fig. 3.1). These "vignettes" document intra-cultural connectivity and therefore serve, first of all, as mere illustrations of the Afro-Eurasian cosmopolitan sphere, although each in a different way. Taken together, they are meant to move from the empirical step of documenting the network (Emesa/Tell Abū Sābūn: around ad 100), via investigating the motivations for a particular "cohabitation of forms" (ʿIraq al Amir/Transjordan: the first decades of the second century bc), toward asking questions on societal impact and the formation of novel cultural constellations (Commagene: 50 bc–ad 50). On purpose, diverse contexts (a royal tomb, an elite pavilion, and a dynastic palace/temple-tomb) and different types of data (grave goods, architecture, and sculpture/reliefs) have been selected. Although a larger network results in a smaller world, for everyone involved, globalization as a process is uneven (Jennings 2011), and power always plays a role (Versluys 2

021). Not all regions, cities, populations, or social strata can actively participate or are affected in the same manner. The case studies are all examples of cosmopolitan nodes that are elite contexts, to a relatively high degree. However, the processes they illustrate are, in structural terms, characteristic for societies and material culture in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East at large.

Near Eastern Connectivity in the *Longue Durée*

Joining up has always been a defining characteristic of the history of the Near East. Wengrow (2010) described the period between the origins of farming and the appearance of the first cities as the first era of "the global village." Standardization processes play a major role in the Halaf period (6000–5300 BC), with the archaeological evidence showing what has been called a "Halaf package" from the Mediterranean to the Zagros Mountains and from the Taurus to the Persian Gulf (Nieuwenhuyse 2017). The late fourth-millennium BC Uruk culture in Mesopotamia was famously analyzed as the first "world-system" by Algaze (1993). Throughout the third millennium BC especially the Mesopotamian cities were connected as part of complex networks of contacts within that region and farther abroad (Mac Sweeney 2017). Their trade networks extended from the Mediterranean, Anatolia, and the Levant toward the Arabic Peninsula, Iran, and the Indus Valley. The famous site of Kanesh (Kültepe) provides us with detailed information about the functioning of this system and its impact. Kanesh was an "enclave" for Assyrian merchants in Anatolia, from where over 23,000 documents have been preserved in Akkadian cuneiform, dating to the first quarter of the second millennium BC. These are letters, receipts, and other trade records inscribed on clay tablets. They show that Kanesh was answerable to a central trading authority in the Assyrian capital of Aššur, some 1,200 km away. But they also testify to the fact that we have to use the word "enclave" with great care and that all kinds of interactions and mutual influences were going on (Michel 2010). In the second part of the second millennium BC, politics come into play prominently, with globalization processes, like time-space compression, becoming evident through international diplomacy, as testified to by the Amarna Letters. Liverani (2000) has coined the term "Great Powers Club" to describe the international relations between the Hatti, Egyptians, Babylonians, Mittani, and their subject rulers in this period. As a result of all these meaningful interactions, a shared visual vocabulary had come into being. This has been described as an "international style" by Feldman (2006), who has also shown the impact of this cosmopolitan *koinè* on the societies in which it functioned and through which it developed. What we see emerging, Feldman (2014) argues, are communities of style; that is, communities that define themselves on a global level in a deterritorialized way. As a result, the local (for instance Egyptian or Assyrian) elements that constitute this style become universalized and thereby lose their original meaning. They are no longer Egyptian or Assyrian in an ethnic or cultural sense but have now become global elements, being "unmarked" from their origin. As a consequence, they can be particularized in local contexts for specific reasons—a form of glocalization that will play an increasingly important role in the first millennium BC. In that era, processes of joining up are enhanced by the fact that (quasi) universal empires, like that of the Achaemenids, come into being. The region that was considered to be the entire (civilized) world was now, for the first time in world history, contained within the borders of a political entity that also defined its identity in these global and inclusive terms (Bang and Kolodziejczyk 2012; Colburn 2017). Globalization is as much about participation as it is about imagination (Appadurai 1996; Agut-Labordère and Versluys 2022). Therefore, there exists a strong link between globalization, universalism, and the

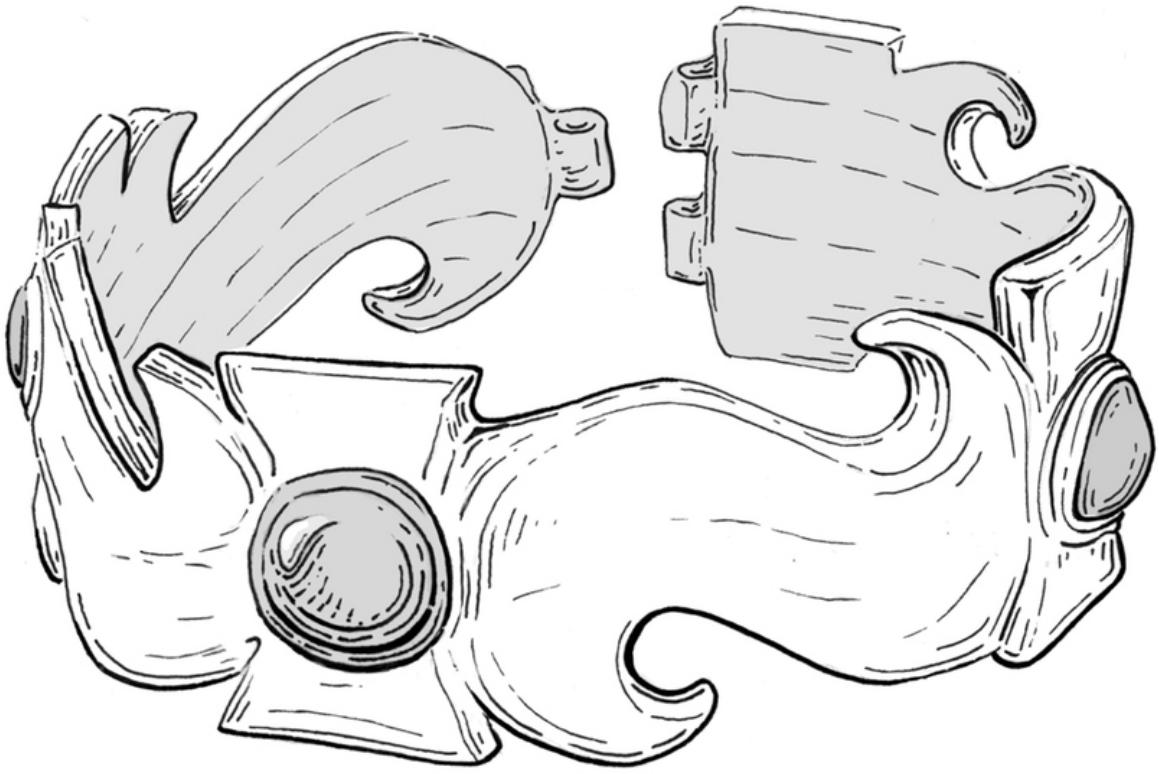
development of new cultural forms (Adams 2008). The Persian Empire illustrates that very well. In the Achaemenid period, one could travel from Persepolis to Memphis in less than two weeks and we do see massive attempts at standardization in order to deal with this scale of deterritorialization. It is important to realize that already in this period, people from everywhere were anywhere, while at the same time ideas and goods were circling at least as widely (Colburn 2017). Alexander the Great was careful to step into the cosmopolitan footsteps of the Achaemenids, and his conquests were as much another intensification of Afro-Eurasian connectivity as the result of it (Briant 1996). Because of this, the Mediterranean became more intensively intertwined with the Near East than ever before. As a result, Hellenism acquired an enormous momentum and there was an unprecedented amount of dialogue, borrowing, and entanglement. This cosmopolitan system became, one could say, stabilized or institutionalized from the period of around 200 BCE onwards, when the Roman Empire, on the one hand, and the Parthian Empire, on the other, developed as states. It was therefore easier for both goods and people to cross Afro-Eurasia faster and in larger quantities during this period than it had ever been before. How did local communities deal with and embed this global diversity they were confronted with?

A Necropolis in Ancient Emesa (Tell Abū Sābūn)

The finds from the dynastic necropolis of Tall Abū Sābūn are related to the rulers of Emesa, in the region of Homs in western Syria today (for all information on the tombs here summarized, see Konrad 2014 and 2017; cf. also Kropp 2013). Emesa was a strategic trading hub because of two important trade routes that intersected in the region: the "Incense Road," running from present-day Yemen to the north, which crossed with part of the "Silk Roads" that ran from the west to the Persian Gulf, and then farther on east. As far as we know, the region was inhabited by nomadic tribes with an Arabian background in the first centuries BC and characterized by a strongly differentiated social structure. There seem to have been no Hellenized *poleis*, like there were in the Levant. The implosion of the Seleucid Empire and the influence of the Romans after 64 BC provided new possibilities for local power structures to be constructed. However, it is unsure who built these structures and profited from them. It is difficult to say what exactly constituted local (or "native") in Emesa in the Roman period. It has been suggested that the elites were, in fact, global players, not necessarily native to the region and engaged in long-distance trade, while by far the largest part of the (native) population continued to live their (semi-)nomadic lives (Sommer 2005). This circumstance might explain why the kings of Emesa strongly focused on their religious identity, in particular, as priests of Elegabal. Seeing they had little, if any, ethnic or cultural identity to offer in local or regional terms, and because they could not claim legitimation through military success, either, due to the domination of the Roman and Parthian Empires, their choice for identity construction would focus only on the domain of religion.

Tomb 1 is dated to the first quarter of the first century AD. The burial itself stands in the tradition of the fossa tombs, well known from the northern steppe zone. In the tomb, which was originally covered by five large basalt plates, we should probably picture a wooden sarcophagus, as can be deduced from the gold-sheet appliques that have been preserved. These appliques show standardized mythological depictions, like Medusa, victories, lions, olive twigs, and Apollo. The finds of a golden mask and a silver amphora for libation indicate that cultic ceremonies for the deceased took place here. Golden masks, like the one found here, can be placed in the tradition of sun cults as known from the Levant and Mesopotamia, but equally

known from the Bosporan kingdoms and central Asia. From the ensemble of the grave goods themselves, the facial helmet has attracted the most attention. This helmet was typically part of Roman pageantry and parade armor from the late Augustan period onward. The silver visor and gilded decorative elements testify to its remarkable high quality. The helmet has best-known parallels in the (far) West and is commonly interpreted as a prestigious gift from the Romans to the Emesan "client king" that would have been buried here. Two decorated golden (finger) rings likewise seem to refer to "Rome." One, a ring of solid gold, shows an oriental monarch, perhaps an Emesan king presenting himself in the Augustan fashion. The other, which is clearly of Roman provenance and probably dates to the Augustan period, shows Apollo, the tutelary deity of Augustus.



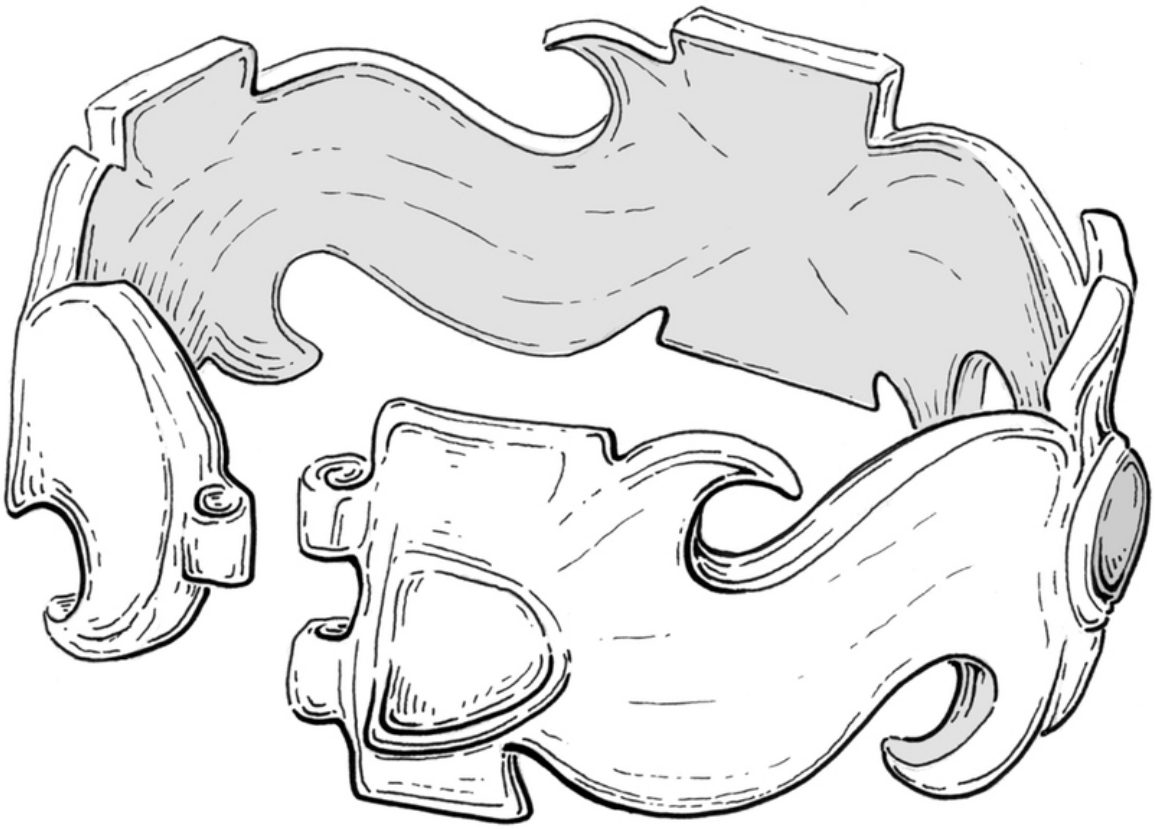


FIGURE 3.2. Emesa: the golden bracelet found in tomb 1 of the Tell Abū Sābūn necropolis (drawing by Joanne Porck after Konrad 2014, Taf. 99).

The case of the solid gold inlaid bracelet is markedly different (fig. 3.2). This piece of jewelry clearly belongs to the tradition of the steppe cultures of central Asia; the best parallels for such objects in this period come from the region of the Black Sea, on the one hand, and Tilya Tepe (in present-day Afghanistan), on the other. This bracelet's presence is unique for either Hellenistic or Roman Syria. The golden applique in the form of a ram's head, perhaps originally part of a horse's gear, is reminiscent of the material culture of the central Asian steppes, as well, with a fine parallel from a Scythian kurgan in the necropolis of Berel in the Altai. Scant remains of golden robe stitching, indicative of ceremonial clothes with golden appliques, might equally refer to the tradition of the northern steppes. However, examples from Mesopotamia, especially Hatra, are also known; this shows to what a wide extent this had become a tradition of dynastic or religious display geographically, in the first centuries ad. An amulet made from glass, blue and shaped like a triangle, might come from the Levant or even Egypt. Such amulets are well known from tombs in Syria and the Near East, where they served as *apotropaicum*. The section of a lance, partly decorated with gold and therefore probably intended as insignia, has parallels in (the Persian) past of the region, as well. A golden fibula has a contemporary comparandum from Palmyra.

Although less impressive and extensive, other tombs from the necropolis show equal combinations of what seem to be local/regional elements, objects, styles, and motifs taken from a trans-local, global repertoire. What did the network Emesa was part of look like and how can this embedding of objects and ideas from all over Afro-Eurasia be accounted for? It is difficult to reconstruct the exact meaning and impact of these different elements in depth. Roman power and the status of the Emesan dynasts as "client kings" will undoubtedly have played a role, but perhaps the most interesting conclusion, in this respect, is that the Emesan dynasty did not simply "go Roman," although the appropriation of the typically Roman cavalry helmet could certainly be interpreted as hinting at such a connection. They were clearly looking north, south, east, and west in Emesa; drawing on the available repertoire from the whole of Afro-Eurasia. However, we should be careful not to return to cultural containers in our understanding of the Emesa tomb finds. Following the methodology proposed by this chapter, we should realize that all the different elements mentioned had been "unmarked" from their origin in the period around ad 100 and been appropriated and made to work in different contexts for different purposes, for a long time already. The golden embroidered ceremonial dress, for instance, clearly has parallels in the Scythian world, but at the very same time it developed into something akin to a Mesopotamian tradition. The enigmatic bracelet is a case in point, too. There are clear parallels from steppe cultures from the far north and east; but might not the reason for appropriation rather be the fact that the Parthian kings had made such objects part of their dynastic display? The same can be said concerning the fibula. This clearly follows a Roman tradition but has its best parallel in Palmyra. The case of Emesa underlines that we should not focus on (exclusive) ethnic or cultural identities in our interpretation but rather on the networks in space and time that these objects were part of. The finds from Tall Abū Sābūn compellingly illustrate that these networks indeed stretched across the whole Afro-Eurasian sphere. In Emesa, the particularity of a local culture was thus constituted within the universality of a global network.

An Architectural Complex in ʻIraq al Amir

In the first part of the second century BC, a Jew from an old-standing Ammonite family, known as the Tobiads, substantially renovated and monumentalized the centuries-old family estate located on the road from Jericho to Amman. His name was Hyrcan, a figure we know from various passages in the *Jewish Antiquities* (12.4) by Flavius Josephus. Hyrcan was a Ptolemaic ally and their tax collector in this part of the Levant. The domain of the Tobiads is known as the site of ʻIraq al Amir in present-day Jordan. The most remarkable and monumental building of the complex is the Qasr: a large pavilion that consisted of two floors. Josephus tells us that Hyrcan constructed the complex in seven years and entirely from local stone. Around the Qasr, an artificial landscape was created, with water surrounding the pavilion itself, while terraces and small building elements, like a monumental entrance gate, water basins, and canals, were distributed all around (for all information on the complex here summarized see Will and Larché 1991; Larché 2005; and Etienne and Salles 2010).

The pavilion measures 37 × 18.5 m and consists of two levels that open onto both the north and south sides through vestibules featuring Corinthian columns on the ground-floor level and a surrounding colonnade on the first floor. The first floor on the northern side contains a loggia made from Corinthian columns directly above the vestibule, which interrupts the surrounding colonnade. These columns feature sculpted acanthus leaves above their bases and they support a Doric entablement. With its more open and monumental appearance, this northern side clearly was meant to function as the main entrance. The ground-floor level is completed by an Ionian entablement that surrounds the entire building and that encompasses an alternation of stylized cow-heads and discs. The ground floor has simple windows at the east and west sides, as well as a single element of sculptural decoration: a walking panther, facing north, which is used as a waterspout. The most impressive sculptural decorations are found on the outside of the first floor, at the northern side main entrance. They feature a (duplicated) lion on the corner with a lioness and their cubs behind him. Above the (again) Ionian entablement of the surrounding colonnade, on the outside corners of the building and the corners of the loggia, we find four eagles. This decorative scheme is repeated at the southern side, albeit with only two eagles on the corner of the building.

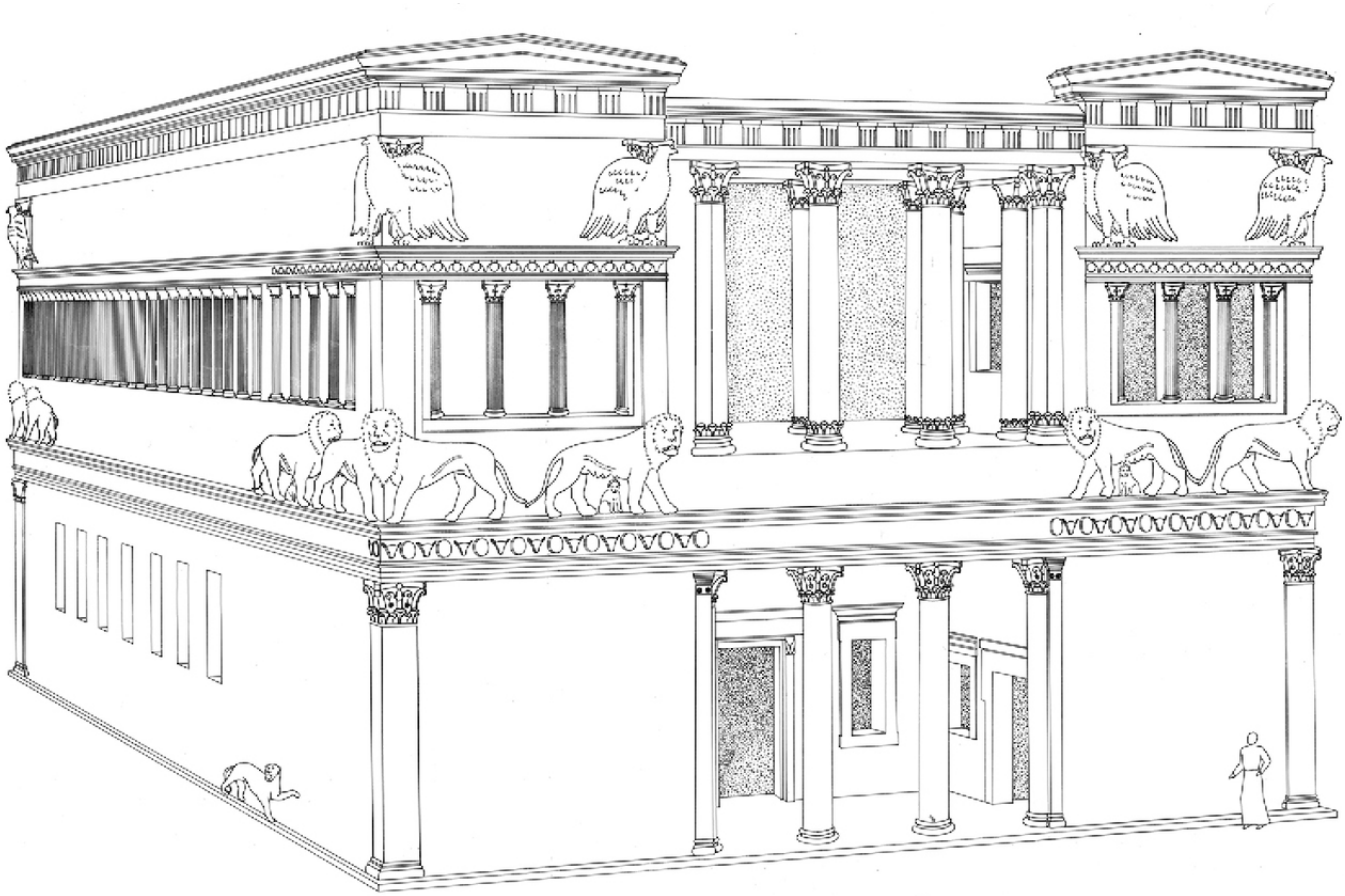


FIGURE 3.3. The pavilion of the complex of ʻIraq al Amir: reconstruction and anastylosis in situ (after Will and Larché et al., 1991; with permission).

The surrounding entablement that completes the first-floor level is Doric (fig. 3.3). It is likely that the rooms on the ground floor were all vaulted; they may (partly) have served as storage rooms or servant quarters. The first floor was much more important and prestigious, as is already evident from the architectural structure and decoration of the building's exterior. The plan of the first floor is very open and presents a series of rooms that were all connected. Such a plan has no precedent in the region and it is still unclear what it represents in functional terms; it seems to concern a series of suites in which guests were meant to circulate; in other words, where the intention was to look and to be looked at.

How and why, in what particular way, was global diversity embedded at ʻIraq al Amir? The building's composite character and novelty seem to be its most striking feature. Although made from local limestone, the architecture and architectural decorations demonstrate a wide-ranging inspiration. The first source clearly seems to be Alexandria. This becomes evident from the use of the Ptolemaic (royal) cubit of 52.5 cm as the basic unit of design, as well as from the use of distinct elements we mainly know from the Ptolemaic capital, such as decorating column bases with acanthus leaves. The Corinthian capitals, with their large and independent volutes are typical for the architecture of cosmopolitan Alexandria as well. This kind of "baroque playfulness," as it is sometimes called, is likewise evident from the use of various composites, such as the Corinthian columns that support the entablatures of different Ionian and even Doric orders. But there seems to be more to ʻIraq al Amir than a copying of Alexandrian masters by a local ruler who depended on them. This originality becomes clear from the architect's radical decision to put all emphasis on the first floor, while using the ground floor and its entrance only

as a prelude to what was to follow. The sculptural decoration is also involved; the placement of the lions at the corners of the first floor, with a duplicated lion on the corner itself, is without parallel. The style in which Hyrcan's lions are depicted is deliberately archaizing, which suggests that an association was sought not only with the cosmopolitan present as manifested in Alexandria but also with the Achaemenid past. As such, they may present a form of Persianism (Strootman and Versluys 2017), just as the lush water garden situated around the Qasr, which seems suggestive of a Persian *paradeisos*, likewise seems to be doing. But there is more "looking back" going on at 'Iraq al Amir, as the Doric entablature in particular seems to indicate. The archaizing atmosphere of the building as a whole was probably meant as a legitimation of Hyrcan's position within the late Hellenistic world. He wanted to look dignified. This idea is underlined by the execution of the monumental gate that marked the entrance to the residential quarter of the estate. This was an impressively large porch made of colossal blocks, featuring a Doric entablature and two archaizing lions as decoration, which are reminiscent of an oriental style.

At 'Iraq al Amir, Hyrcan embedded many elements that had already traveled widely in the past and that had become "unmarked" from their original context and meaning, and functioned as part of a global Hellenistic *koinè* as a result. Doric and Ionic entablatures, Corinthian columns, acanthus leaves at strange places, panthers, lions, and eagles: all of these elements came with their own (global) genealogy and together constituted the (local) site of 'Iraq al Amir, as a consequence. During this period, a trend even seems to emerge whereby architects, artists, and commissioners purposefully sought to make buildings and works of art that were as composite, different, and innovative as possible, in search of a result that was unique. 'Iraq al Amir seems to be an example of exactly this trend, which I have previously proposed to call "innovative eclecticism": the practice of quoting a variety of decorative forms, as widespread and diverse as possible, in order to produce something new that caused amazement through its 'modernity' and originality (Versluys 2017). In general terms, innovative eclecticism was meant to demonstrate the extraordinary possibilities and status of the commissioner. It allowed them to connect with tradition, while simultaneously expanding it and creating something new that was more than the sum of its parts (cf. Versluys 2022). The site of 'Iraq al Amir, therefore, illustrates how global culture is brought to the local level, while simultaneously local culture becomes part of that global level, through this process of *bricolage*, as a result. In case of the Qasr, we can understand the reasons for this particular "cohabitation of forms" a bit more in depth than we could for Emesa; as a trans-local competition for legitimacy. We can also speculate, but only still in rather general terms, that this form of embedding global diversity had quite an impact: 'Iraq al Amir is an early example of a particular form of "innovative eclecticism" that would have a great career in the Near East afterward (see Freyberger 1998 for many examples). Be that as it may, the cosmopolitan cultural form that is the Qasr is used to communicate both: Hyrcan's global universalism as well as his local and regional particularism.

Commagene: Nemrud Dağ and a Portrait Head from Samosata

In 1984, during the Samosata salvage excavations, a remarkable head of a male statue was found, made from white limestone. Located on the west bank of the Euphrates in northern Syria (present-day Turkey), Samosata was the capital of the dynasts of Commagene. The best-known member of the Orontid dynasty is Antiochos I, who ruled between 69 and 36 BC and who built the mountaintop sanctuary of Nemrud Dağ. The Orontids ruled their small but

important kingdom from the middle of the second century BC until its final integration into the Roman *provincia* of Syria in AD 72/73. The luxurious building in which the portrait head was found was probably their royal palace. Although there is damage to the nose, mouth, and left eyebrow, the head has been well preserved. Remarkable features include the holes drilled into the royal diadem, which were probably meant for the attachment of a radiate crown originally, as well as an inscription that is superficially chiseled beneath the left eye and reads ANTIOXO (Riedel 2018 with all previous literature) (fig. 3.4).

FIGURE 3.4. The portrait head from Samosata, now in the museum of Adīyaman (photo: Jörg Wagner).

The hairstyle of the portrait, characterized by crescent-shaped strands in overlapping rows, closely resembles early portraits of Octavian created around 40 bc. As Syria had become a Roman province in administrative terms in 64 bc, one could imagine a local ruler to want to follow a dynastic example emanating from Rome, around 40 bc. However, at that time, the growing power from Rome and the dynastic example for the eastern part of the Mediterranean and Near East, in those terms, was in fact Mark Antony; and this portrait certainly does not refer to him. When later, in the imperial period, local dynasts seek to position themselves in line with the new global power represented by Octavian, now Augustus, they most often do so by following the model of Augustan classicism, as developed in the final decades of the first century bc. This makes unlikely an interpretation of the portrait as either the ruling Antiochos I (69–36 bc) or Antiochos III, who ruled between 12 bc and ad 17. Stefan Riedel (2018) has therefore argued that we deal with a *posthumous* portrait of Antiochos I here; an interpretation that would be underlined by the identification ANTIOXO on the head itself. This suggests that the portrait was part of a historicizing display, like an ancestor gallery. The head was found in the southern room of a tripartite suite, where also other portrait heads were discovered, which supports the idea of an ancestor gallery from a contextual point of view. This is likely, in more general terms, because we are certain that in three other (dynastic) contexts in Hellenistic-Roman Commagene, ancestor galleries were displayed, as well.

What such historicizing displays aimed to achieve is probably illustrated best in Nemrud Dağ. Somewhere around the middle of the first century bc, King Antiochos I installed an impressive ancestor gallery at this temple-tomb high up in the Taurus Mountains. The site consists of a tumulus surrounded by two major terraces (fig. 3.5). Each terrace originally contained more or less the same elements, including a series of five monumental statues. A large inscription in Greek, situated at the back of these colossi, a great cult inscription containing a *nomos* (law), provides information on the function of the monument and the intentions of its builder. In terms of identity and style, the monument contains Greek as well as Persian (or Iranian) aspects, while the king referred to himself not only as *philhellen* but also as *philorhomaios*. There were ancestor galleries on both terraces. They consist of large stelae with figurative depictions, in front of which an altar was placed. Fifteen stelae depicted the Persian ancestors, from whom Antiochos I claimed to descend, starting with his father Mithridates I and going back, via three Armenian kings and three Persian satraps, all the way to the Achaemenid kings and ultimately Dareios I himself. Functioning as pendants, seventeen reliefs depicted the claimed Macedonian and Seleucid ancestors of Antiochos I, starting with Antiochos I's daughter, wife, and mother and going back, via female members of the Seleucid dynasty, to the Seleucid kings and, ultimately, before Seleukos I, to Alexander the Great. Antiochos I constructed this monument for reasons of ideology, social order, and canon-building and he sought to achieve these goals by means of a strategy of *bricolage*. At Nemrud Dağ, we see the juxtaposing and blending of discrete elements suggestive of different places and times within a single, distinctly novel monument and as a result of conscious appropriation, like we also saw in 'Iraq al Amir. In this case, it seems possible to understand the reasons for this particular way of *bricolage* more in depth. At Nemrud Dağ, a trans-local competition for legitimacy seems to be going on as well, but why were elements specifically suggestive of Greek and Persian cultural traditions juxtaposed and blended? And what was the impact of this innovation?

FIGURE 3.5. The site of Nemrud Dağ (photo: Forschungsstelle Asia Minor).

Again, we should remind ourselves not to fall back on ethnic or cultural containers in answering these questions. "Going Greek" in the Mediterranean and Near East of the first century BC mostly, if not always, implied a form of *Hellenism*: a source of social power that should be understood as a choice to associate with civilization and 'modernity'—and that had been active in a large part of Eurasia for several centuries already. During the same period, something akin to *Persianism* was clearly occurring, as well: a source of social power used to assert dynastic legitimacy by claiming the legacy of the Achaemenid Empire (Strootman and Versluys 2017). Persianism had a rich genealogy in the first century BC and was used throughout large parts of Hellenistic Eurasia. The suggestion of the Achaemenid tradition will immediately have signaled kingship to the viewer, while, in similar vein, the various elements we call Greek will immediately have made clear that Antiochos I aimed to have a career on the forefront of the global stage of the Hellenistic kings. The fact that the combination of these two cultural scenarios was novel and without precedent was not only important, in itself, as a form of innovative eclecticism, but it also underlined their respective messages (Versluys 2017).

Besides the widely circulating cultural concepts of Hellenism and Persianism, which both simultaneously pointed to other times as well as other places, Antiochos I also used the term *philorhomaios*, next to the better known *philhellen*. *Philhellen* ("admirer of things Greek") first occurs with Herodotos and is seen used by non-Hellenistic kings in their titulature, as a form of Hellenism, from the mid-second century BC onward; for instance, it is used by the Parthian king Mithridates I in 141 bc, after his victory over Babylonia. *Philorhomaios* is only seen used in the late Hellenistic period and therefore seems to have developed as a counterpart to the already existing and functioning term *philhellene* in the context of dynastic self-stylization. Both terms, *philhellen* and *philorhomaios*, therefore, do not so much seem to serve as pendants as that they are used to claim membership of the Afro-Eurasian club of Hellenistic kings. Up to a certain point, *philhellen* still sufficed, but in the social and political context of the first century bc, *philorhomaios* was added to express the same thing. If it is possible that the Samosata portrait head might be a contemporary depiction of Antiochos I after all, we might speculate that the hairstyle was a display of his Romanism as a form of Hellenism. In combination with the radiate crown, moreover, the portrait would have been a strikingly original example of embedding global diversity, as the other parts of his dynastic program. It is only after Actium that more direct references to Augustus and Roman power become visible in the Near East, as a form of appropriation. Herod probably provides the best-discussed example thereof (Lichtenberger 2009).

The wider impact of this most innovative example of embedding global diversity is debated (Blömer et al. 2020). Although it has been argued that the program of Agrippa's Pantheon in Rome, as well as the Philopappos monument in Athens, were influenced by the Antiochan project, its direct repercussions seem to have been rather limited. That most certainly had to do with the fact that, after Actium, the political situation changed rather dramatically, with no room for a dynastic program like that of Antiochos I. If we see it, however, as part of a much larger group of "genre experiments," and characteristic of Hellenistic-Roman Commagene as a "laboratory" for innovation through embedding by *bricolage*, its global impact was major. The cult of Mithras might be an example of such a highly successful Commagenean genre experiment that went global. Another case in point is the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus that embedded various cultural traditions and would spread, from Commagene, over large parts of Afro-Eurasia (Collar 2013; cf. Blömer 2017). These then are the historical consequences of embedding global diversity.

Beyond Hybridity: "The Cohabitation of Forms"

Discussing questions of continuity, change, and identity concerning Lebanese temples from the Hellenistic and Roman period, Kevin Butcher (2013, 209) concluded:

> We need to move beyond our captivation with the authentic, defined by the perceived origins of forms and styles, when considering the relationship between religious architecture and identity in Roman Syria.

That is exactly what this chapter has tried to do, as well: using globalization/glocalization and, more specifically, the idea of embedding global diversity as a conceptual framework to achieve this shift in focus from roots to routes (Clifford 1997).

Describing the history of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East in terms of embedding global diversity is, of course, strongly intertwined with our present-day concerns (Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hoo 2023). It could therefore be argued that this methodology may be anachronistic—as every form of history writing probably is. However, thinking with globalization, as a heuristic

tool, is particularly useful in this phase of the development of our field. Now that the history of Hellenistic-Roman Syria and the Near East seems to have developed into a proper, independent subject at last and is no longer defined by the straitjackets of either Graeco-Roman or Near Eastern history and archaeology, we should not make the mistake of retaining their interpretative categories and concepts. The main task before us, therefore, is to investigate Hellenistic-Roman Syria and the Near East "beyond hybridity," as something new in itself and as more than the sum of the parts (cf. Versluys 2022) that came together during that particular time and place. We should, therefore, try to make sense of all the genre experiments we encounter in terms of embedding global diversity as a creative process. As Arjun Appadurai concluded, now already more than a decade ago (2010, 10):

> Indeed, the circulation of forms produces new and distinct genre experiments, many of which are forced to coexist in uneven and uneasy combinations. One lesson here is that we need to move decisively beyond existing models of creolization, hybridity, fusion, syncretism, and the like, which have largely been about mixture at the level of content. Instead, we need to probe the cohabitation of forms … because they actually produce new contexts through their peculiar inflection of each other.

Acknowledgments

This contribution was written as part of the NWO project *Innovating Objects. The Impact of Global Connections and the Formation of the Roman Empire (ca. 200–30 BC)* (VICI 277-61-001) that I coordinated at Leiden University in the period 2016-2022. I would like to thank all project members for their input and critical feedback as well as Marike van Aerde for her editing of my English text. The section on ʿIraq al Amir rephrases part of my article "The Only Hellenistic Ruin of Great Interest in Jordan," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 52 (2019): 240–244; the section on Emesa rephrases part of my review of Konrad 2014 as published in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palastina-Vereins* 135(2) (2019): 218–222.

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CHAPTER 4

THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN NEAR EAST

Geography and Climate

EIVIND HELDAAS SELAND

Introduction

The Near East is the literal crossroads of continents, a cradle of civilization, and the wellspring of three major world religions. Through the ages it has experienced its share of imperial rulers and invading armies, each inscribing a layer in the complex palimpsest that has become the history of the region. For long periods, however, relative cultural and political continuity has prevailed. For almost a millennium, from the late fourth century BC until the mid-seventh century AD, most of the Near East was controlled by rulers who identified themselves first as Macedonian or Greek, and from the mid-first century BC as Roman. All history unfolds in geographical space. This article addresses the natural environment of the Near East and how scholarship has approached it as a factor in the historical development of the region in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Already two geographical terms and three cultural, political, and chronological labels have been employed, all of them modern, although referring to historically existing conditions. "Hellenistic" was first used by the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen in 1833 to refer to the polities combining regional with Greek-Macedonian traditions established in the wake of Alexander III ("the Great") of Macedon's conquest of the Achaemenid Empire and lasting until the conquest of Egypt by Rome in 30 bc (Droysen 1980). Local and regional rulers, however, continued to identify with this heritage long into the Roman era (Kaizer and Facella 2010; Kropp 2013; Hekster and Fowler 2005), and many cultural traits originating in this period, including Greek language and the Seleucid Era, remained important in the Near East until long after the period discussed here. The Romans got increasingly involved in the eastern Mediterranean from the late third century bc. In 64 bc, Pompey deposed the last Seleucid king and established the Roman province of Syria. Roman control lasted until the Arab conquest that took place almost exactly seven centuries later, ad 634–638. While several important studies of Roman rule in the Near East address shorter time spans (Millar 1994; Sartre 2005), this chapter follows a number of major syntheses on the Roman Near East in using this long periodization for the selection of literature reviewed here (Butcher 2003; Ball 2016; Isaac 1992). Needless to say, the topic being geography and climate, many phenomena remained stable throughout the period, and many developments had roots in earlier times and continued after the end of Roman rule.

Syria was originally the name used by the Greeks for the lands of the neo-Assyrian Empire, or rather the parts of it of which they had knowledge, along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean (Sartre 2005, 1–2). Here it is used for the region between the Mediterranean coast and the Khabur/Euphrates line, and between the Taurus Mountains and the northern end of the Red Sea. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Syria was also used to designate provinces and landscapes encompassing only parts of this region, such as the late Roman provinces of Syria Coele, Syria Phoenice, and Syria Palestina.

To the Greeks and Romans, the East was the land of the rising sun (*anatolê*/*oriens*), i.e., anything east of Greece or Italy, respectively. While Syria was certainly part of this East, the Anatolê/Oriens designation was used at different times for regions also including parts of the Balkans, Asia Minor, and Egypt (cf. Talbert and Bagnall 2000, 100–102), generally not considered parts of the Near East in twentieth- and twenty-first-century usage. The terms Near East and also the Levant, however, historically referred to the Ottoman Empire and thus also included these regions, but they have largely been replaced by the term Middle East in twentieth-century and later geopolitical discourse (Held 1989, 6–9). They are now commonly used by scholars to describe the smaller region encompassing the modern states and territories of Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Syria, and the Hatay province of Turkey, thus corresponding with the wide definition of Syria. Cyprus, often included in definitions of the Near East, is not discussed here, for reasons of historical and geographical coherence.

Landforms

If the wider Middle East was the hub around which the Old World revolved, the Near East was the axle on which the hub was mounted. The geomorphology of the region is a product of the Arabian tectonic plate gradually rotating away from the African plate to the west, and thus colliding with the Eurasian plate to the north and east (Held 1989, 31–33; Mart, Ryan, and Luni na 2005). The latter process has formed the Anti-Taurus Mountains that delimit the region addressed here to the north. The separation of Arabia from Africa opened the Levantine rift, which is the series of north–south valleys lined on both sides by mountain ranges, going from southern Turkey through the Ghab depression in northern Syria, the Bekaa and Jordan Valleys and Wadi Araba, to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea (Held 1989, 34; Mart, Ryan, and Lunina 2005).

The Mediterranean coastal plain narrows from some 50 km at the latitude of Gaza, to little or near nothing north of the Israel–Lebanon border, where the foothills in places descend directly into the ocean. The mountains are at their tallest in the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges with numerous peaks above 2,000 m. Four main corridors facilitate passage between coast and interior: the Antakya Graben, the Homs Gap, and the passes between Haifa and the Jordan Valley, and from Jaffa toward Jerusalem (Wirth 1971, 41; Karmon 1983, 16). The north–south direction of the mountains has made natural harbors relatively scarce (Karmon 1983, 16), but a handful of headlands offer sheltered anchorage and have formed centers of settlement and exchange since the Bronze Age, especially in locations where safe mooring could be combined with overland communication (Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 57–68). East of the Levantine rift system and south of the Anatolian Mountains, the terrain takes the form of a plateau, gradually sloping toward the Persian Gulf. Plains and undulating hills in northern Syria are interrupted by the Palmyride mountain belt running from the vicinity of Damascus northeast toward the Euphrates. South and east of the Palmyrides, the Syrian Desert consists mainly of flat gravel plains known as the Hamad, except in the southwest, where the rugged volcanic landscape of Harra gives way to the better watered volcanic plateau of the Hauran and the Jebel Druze on the border between present-day Syria and Jordan.

Apart from the tallest parts of the mountain massifs, much of the Near East has been ocean floor for substantial parts of its geological history and is covered by thick layers of marine sediments, mostly limestones and sandstones (Karmon 1983, 9–12; Wirth 1971, 45–57). The coastal plain of present-day Israel has heavy deposits of sands brought by wind and sea from the Sinai, the Nile, and North Africa (Karmon 1983, 13–16). Some areas, most prominently the

Hauran of southern Syria and the Harra of eastern Jordan, consist primarily of volcanic deposits. Rich soils have developed in regions with ample rainfall and thus vegetation, corresponding with the region known as the Fertile Crescent, and in the volcanic regions with more fine-grained sediments, such as the Hauran (Held 1989, 61–62; Wirth 1971, 57–58, map between pp. 61 and 62). Other volcanic areas as well as the inner desert regions, with their aridity, strong winds, and flat topographies, consist of hard crusts of lava or rock-soils, respectively, covered with rocks and pebbles and with very limited vegetation (Held 1989, 60–61). In the basins of the Euphrates, Khabur, and the Orontes, fertile alluvial soils of varying thickness and extent have been formed (Held 1989, 61).

Water and Drainage

Along with climate, discussed later in the chapter, these landforms determine the distribution of water, so influential on human settlement and subsistence. West of the coastal ranges, the terrain drains toward the Mediterranean Sea. Numerous small streams fed by winter rains and sources dependent on melting snow drain toward the Mediterranean (Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 44). Along the Levantine rift, the north–south watershed is in the Bekaa Valley. The Orontes rises near Baalbek and flows northward through Homs and Hama, past ancient Apamea and through Antioch, reaching the Mediterranean at ancient Seleucia Peirea (Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 44; Weulersse 1940; Wirth 1971, 110–111). The river was used extensively for irrigation at least by the late Roman period, as is evident from the oldest parts of the Homs Dam, as well as mosaics showing the still existing water-lifting wheels known as *noria* (Horden and Purcell 2000, 241; Kamash 2012). The Litani flows southward through the Bekaa before turning westward and falling steeply to the Mediterranean coast, which it meets just north of Tyre. The Jordan flows from the slopes of Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea, joined by the perennial tributaries of Yarmouk and Zarqa (Karmon 1983, 126–130). Wadi Jerash, a tributary of the Zarqa, supported the ancient city of Gerasa, also known as Antiochia on the Golden River, underlining the importance of rivers for major centers of habitation (Lichtenberger and Raja 2016; Lichtenberger et al. 2021). East of the inner mountain range of the Levantine rift, water drains inland—the Barada river, for instance, feeding the Damascus Oasis, and the Queiq running through Aleppo and Qinnasrin (ancient Chalkis), now much reduced and in periods dry due to dams and irrigation (Wirth 1971, 110–111; Butcher 2003, 13). Water also moves through the ground, creating springs along the Dead Sea and in the Jordan Valley, notably at Jericho.

The most important river, of course, was the Euphrates, which originates in eastern Anatolia and drains into the Persian Gulf. The river forms the eastern limit of the area discussed here, and the river valley, although certainly not as wide as in middle and southern Mesopotamia, was a major zone of settlement in antiquity, due to its possibilities for irrigated agriculture, especially in the region near and immediately downriver of the Khabur-Euphrates confluence. The river itself and the tracks along it also constituted the main corridor of overland and riverine communication between Syria and the Mesopotamian region from the Bronze Age until the introduction of motorized transport in the twentieth century (Finet 1969; Rollinger and Ruffing 2013).

Nothing can live in the extremely salty waters of the Dead Sea. Before the modern construction of artificial lakes, the only freshwater body of importance was Lake Tiberias in the Jordan Valley. Late Roman regulation of the Orontes created a forerunner of the Homs Lake (Kamash 2012). The large Lake Assad on the Euphrates is the artificial result of the Tabqa Dam

that was finished in 1974. However, several of the watercourses draining eastward and southward from the inner coastal range and the Anatolian Mountains, most prominently the Barada and the Queiq, used to end in permanent lakes reported to have supported fish before they dried out due to modern irrigation and urban water needs (Wirth 1971, 113).

Despite the popular notion that modern borders in the Near East are more or less arbitrary, they correspond quite well with drainage. In present-day Iraq, water drains toward the Euphrates Valley. Surface as well as groundwater follows major wadis (valleys with intermittent watercourses) where the few available wells can be found (Meyer and Seland 2016; Seland 2019). In Syria and Jordan the desert region consists of a number of closed drainage basins, where surface water gathers in pools, so-called *khabras*, in winter (Wirth 1971, 63–64). These play an important role in the pastoral economy. Groundwater also converges in springs at low points of these basins, as well as along the edge of the Palmyride mountain range, creating oases and pastoral hot spots. Palmyra is by far the most important, but other notable examples with strategic if not necessarily economic importance include Qaryatayn, Jazal, Sukhne, Arak, El Kowm, Taybeh, Wadi el-Miyeh, and Azraq.

Geography and Communication

The physical limits of the Near East, with oceans to the west, desert to the south, river to the east, and mountains to the north, imposed certain constraints on armies, traders, and others who traveled through or to the region. From Africa and Egypt, travelers would arrive in Gaza and follow the coast northward to Strato's Tower/Caesarea, where it was possible to cross over to the upper Jordan Valley and from there onward to the Decapolis. Here they could join the ancient route remodeled in the second century as the Via Nova Traiana, running from the Red Sea, skirting Petra, and going to Damascus by way of Bostra (Graf 1995). From Damascus, roads followed the edge of the steppe northward to Homs and Antioch, eastward along the limestone ranges of central Syria to Palmyra, and from there northward to the Euphrates (Bauzou 1989). From Anatolia, the main access to the Near East was through the pass known as the Syrian Gates, just north of Antioch, while travelers from the east might cross the Euphrates at Zeugma ("Bridge") or at important riverine settlements such as Soura, Dura Europos, Circesium, Ana, or Hit. East–west communication would in most cases follow the Euphrates Valley, with the important exception of the caravan road across the Syrian Desert (Schoff 1989; Meyer and Seland 2016; Finet 1969).

Climate

Climate is the average of atmospheric conditions over a prolonged period of time, including pressure, precipitation, temperature, wind, and humidity. As climate to a large extent determines vegetation and fauna in a given location, it also strongly influences human settlement and subsistence.

Climate in the Near East is marked by stark contrasts. In some places temperatures and rainfall vary from moist and temperate to arid, and with hot days and cold nights within kilometers. Most variations can be explained by latitude, pressure systems, oceans, and landforms (Held 1989, 46–48).

Southern parts of the region are within the subtropical high-pressure belt. Dry air heated near the equator sinks toward the ground at ca. 30° (latitude of the Sinai Peninsula and

southern Jordan), creating high atmospheric pressure. Constant high pressure and the absence of large bodies of water on the windward side severely limit precipitation, explaining the belt of aridity running from the African Sahara to the Thar Desert on the border between India and Pakistan (Held 1989, 46–48; Roberts and Wright 1993, 194). In summer this also contributes toward stable and dry weather in the northern Near East. High temperatures are somewhat relieved by the altitude of the inland plateau, but daytime temperatures often reach above 30° centigrade, even higher in the Jordan Valley and in the Wadi Araba (Karmon 1983, 21–27; Held 1989, 46–49).

The dominant climate regime in the bulk of the Near East, however, is that of the Mediterranean. In winter, as the subtropical high moves south, series of low-pressure systems (cyclones) travel from the Atlantic eastward through the Mediterranean, picking up additional moisture under way, bringing precipitation to the coastal mountains and the northern Near East from late October to early May, thus creating the proverbial Fertile Crescent (Karmon 1983, 27; Wirth 1971, 80–87). Winter temperatures are mild along the coast but can be freezing farther inland due to elevation and distance from water. The plateau east of the parallel coastal ranges is to varying degrees in a rain shadow; nevertheless, it receives limited rainfall from the passing lows, supporting rich pastures in the steppe region.

Precipitation in the coastal ranges is ample in the winter, the mountains of northern Lebanon and southern Turkey receiving above 2,000 mm a year, much of it as snow, which continues to feed rivers and springs into the early summer (Held 1989, 51–53). East of the mountains the climate quickly gets drier, contrasts being starker in the south than in the north. It is probably no coincidence that the major historical cities of Jerusalem, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo are situated just west of the 400 mm average annual rainfall isohyet, representing the approximate limit for stable agricultural production even in dry years (Lewis 1987, 1–2; Wirth 1969, 45). The 200 mm isohyet, the theoretical limit for dry agriculture, runs just north of Palmyra and east of Damascus, Bostra, and the ancient Decapolis in present-day Jordan (figure 4.1).

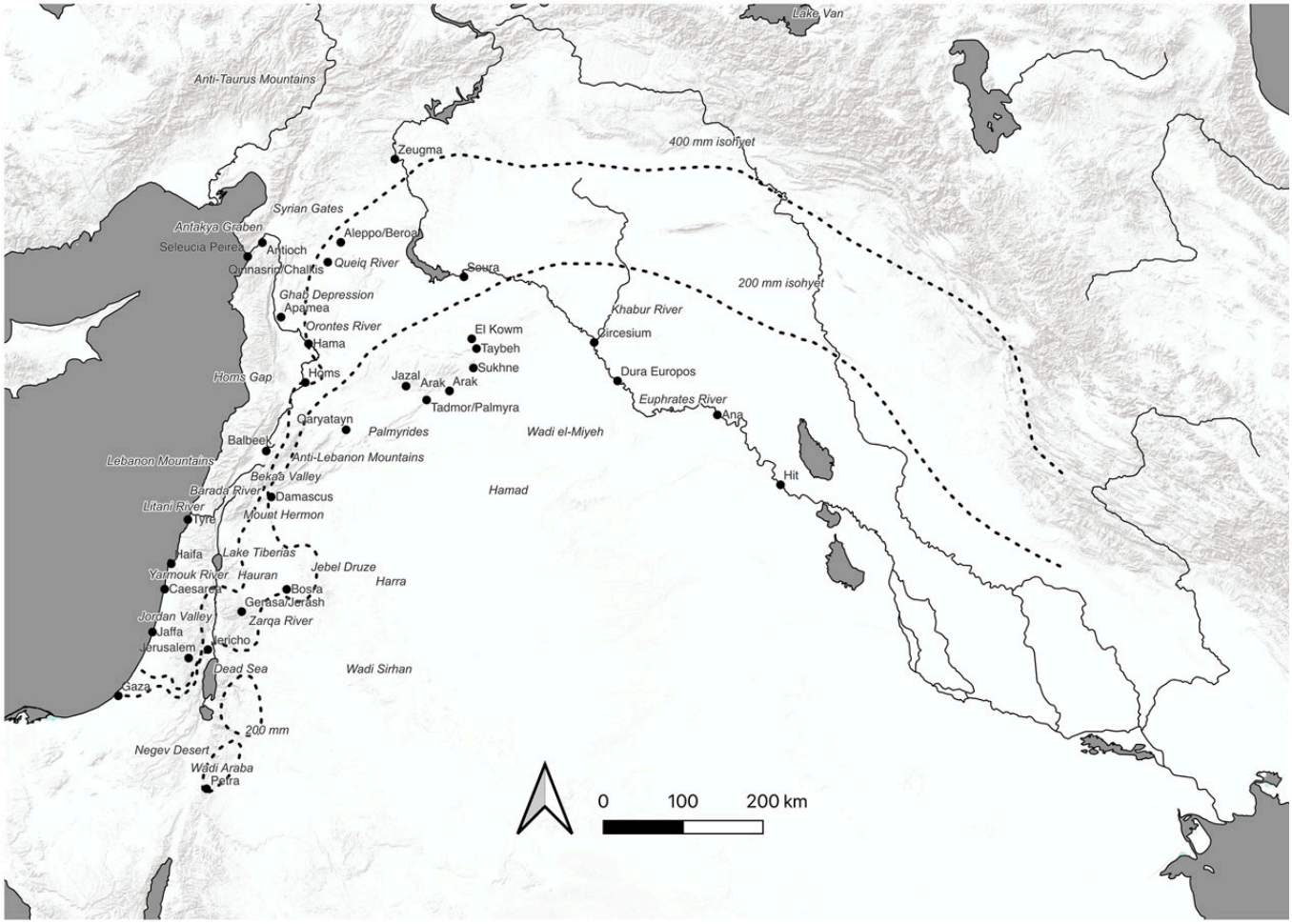

FIGURE 4.1. Places mentioned in this chapter; isohyets (map by Eivind Heldaas Seland, basemap ESRI, sources ESRI, USGS, NOAA).

The first group of cities thus enjoyed relatively ample and stable rainfall in combination with access to the pastoral economy of the steppe; the second depended on water management in order to secure agricultural production in years with below average rainfall (Braemer et al. 2009; Meyer 2017). That human agency could influence the limits of cultivation is clear from the case of the Negev, which today receives well short of 100 mm of annual precipitation, but where permanent agricultural settlements based on runoff farming existed in the Nabataean through Roman periods (Rubin 1996; Rosen 2000; Barker 2002; Vaiglova et al. 2020).

Landscapes of Subsistence

Climate and landforms combine to create three main ecological zones that have shaped settlement and subsistence in the Near East through history (figure 4.1). Areas situated near the Mediterranean coast receive sufficient rainfall for cultivation of the so-called Mediterranean triad (olive-grain-grapes) (Renfrew 1972, 480). In this region, agricultural settlements have formed wherever arable land exists in sufficient quantities. Outside cultivated lands, geographers distinguish between two types of Mediterranean scrubland, the denser and taller *maquis* on the humid side of the watershed and the sparser *garigue* on the dry side (Held 1989, 65). Historically the amply watered mountain regions were also home to considerable forests

of pine, oak, pistachio, terebinth, and cedar, of which only patches now remain (Wilkinson 2003, 18–19). Indented by the arid pocket of the Dead Sea, created by the low elevation, the Mediterranean zone is about 100 km deep from Gaza northward to Homs, thereafter gradually widening into northern Mesopotamia. East of this starts the semi-arid steppe known in Arabic as the *Badya*/*Bilad al-Sham* and to European observers as the Syrian Desert. Today this zone appears largely as wasteland due to over-exploitation as pasture, but with rainfall in the 300–100 mm range it is capable of supporting grass, terebinth, and pistachio, and was described by early travelers as parklands rather than as desert (Betts 1999, 2–4; Wilkinson 2003, 18–19; Oppenheim 1899; Meyer 2017, 17–22; Musil 1928, passim). At least since the third millennium BC, the *Badya* has been the economic basis for sheep- and goat-pastoralism, and since the first millennium BC also for camel pastoralism (Prag 1985; Nichols and Weber 2006; Rosen and Saidel 2010). Finally, more or less skirting the Near East as defined here, comes the actual desert, receiving less than ca. 100 mm annual rainfall, and spanning from the Negev over the great north–south valleys of Wadi Araba and Wadi as Sirhan, to the basalt desert known as the Harra and the stony and mostly barren gravel plains of the Hamad that extend toward the Euphrates, crossed by a series of broad west–east wadis that drain toward the Euphrates (Betts 1999, 1–4; Lancaster and Lancaster 1999).

In some places the transition between these zones is sharply visible and environmentally determined, such as between Jerusalem, which enjoys a comfortable 492 mm of annual precipitation (Rudloff 1981, 234), and the Dead Sea, 20 km east, where it hardly rains at all. In other places, the transition between agricultural land and steppe, and between steppe and desert, is gradual, and influenced by socio-political factors as well as by rainfall (Lewis 1987, 1–2; Wilkinson 2003, 168–169; Rosen 2007, 150–171; Lancaster and Lancaster 1999; Barker 2002; Rosen 2000). This zone, famously described by Gertrude Bell as "between the desert and the sown" has in periods been settled by numerous village communities where inhabitants combined pastoral activities and opportunistic agriculture (Lancaster and Lancaster 1999; Jabbūr 1995; Bell 1907; Meyer 2017; Barker 2002). This was the case throughout the period discussed here, and especially in the late Roman and early Islamic periods.

Climate Change and History

All over the Near East are remains of infrastructure and settlements in regions that were never utilized in the same manner after the early Islamic period (Foss 1995). Examples include the Hasmonean and Herodian palaces and fortresses in the lower Jordan Valley and on the Dead Sea (Burrell 2002), the Roman fortifications along the desert frontier in late antiquity (Kennedy and Riley 1990; Kennedy 2004; Isaac 1992), and agricultural settlements in regions such as the Negev (Barker 2002; Shereshevski 1991; Rubin 1996; Nevo 1991; Vaiglova et al. 2020), the limestone massif of northwestern Syria (Tate 1992; Butcher 2003, 145–153), and the steppe and mountains between Homs and Palmyra (Schlumberger 1951; Meyer 2017). Closely related to this is the question about the reasons behind the shifting power balance and territorial control between agricultural empires and nomadic groups. The debate about the socio-political, economic, and strategic/military dynamics behind these processes is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the possible agency of geography and climate change warrants attention.

Climate, of course, is not constant. The Holocene climate in the Near East is known to have ranged from dramatically drier conditions than today during the Younger Dryas (ca. 12,900–11,700 bp) and in the late third millennium bc, to considerably moister than the current situation for instance in the early Bronze Age (Issar and Zohar 2007). On shorter time scales, the winter

rains in the Near East depend on the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), an interplay between a stable high pressure over the Azores and a low pressure above Iceland, which propels the series of winter cyclones that pass over the region. The NAO has been demonstrated to influence Near Eastern rainfall on a decadal scale (Issar and Zohar 2007, 12; Hurrell 1995; López-Moreno et al. 2011), with potentially dramatic effects for populations pushing against the limits of what their pastures or agricultural lands could support.

As a baseline, the Near Eastern climate in the Hellenistic and Roman periods would feel familiar to a time traveler from the twenty-first century. Landscape archaeology as well as ancient sources let us recognize both the desert and steppe zones and the irrigated and "dry" agricultural landscapes that still characterize the region today, and also that the transition lines between these zones were not very dissimilar from the present (Wilkinson 2003; Str., *Geog*. 16.3.1, and Plin., *HN* 5.85–90). Like their modern counterparts, ancient agriculturalists and nomads also suffered the devastating effects of unusually dry years, the potential effect of which might be illustrated by the 1957–1961 drought that approximately halved Syrian cereal harvests and nearly wiped out nomadic livestock holdings altogether (Wirth 1969, 46; 1971, 13; Issar and Zohar 2007, 210). The questions under debate are primarily how much would different climate in different parts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods change these lines, and also would climate change bend the rules or rather patterns of settlement and subsistence observable in the geographic and ethnographic record of the region as laid out earlier in the chapter. No agreement exists on these issues. Here an attempt is made to summarize what we know, what we do not know, and what the main points of contention are.

Past climates are not directly observable. Traditional archaeological proxies, such as traces of agricultural settlement in areas where such did not exist in more recent times, are ambivalent and unsatisfactory in the sense that they might be and have been interpreted both as signs of a moister climate and of socio-political conditions that permitted and encouraged the necessary investments in hydrological infrastructure (Rosen 2007, 165). Several scientific climate series from or with relevance for the Near East do, however, exist (Roberts and Wright 1993; Wilkinson 2003, 17–22; Rosen 2007, 50–71, 165–169; Issar and Zohar 2007, 11–37; Orland et al. 2009; Witakowski 2010; Finné et al. 2011; McCormick et al. 2013; Izdebski et al. 2016; Harper and McCormick 2018). Oxygen isotopes from stalagmites in the Soreq caves in Jerusalem (Bar-Matthews, Ayalon, and Kaufman 1997; Lawrence et al. 2016), lake sediments from Lake Van and other lakes in eastern Turkey as well as Lake Tiberias in Israel (Degens et al. 1984; Stiller et al. 1984), sea levels from the Dead Sea (Klein 1982; Enzel et al. 2003), and historical levels of the Nile floods (Bonneau 1971; Manning et al. 2017) give a reasonably robust impression of the Near Eastern climate in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, even if the time scale is not very accurate and variation within the region is not well known (Rosen 2007, 153).

In summary, the start of the Hellenistic period coincides with a period of moister climate in the Near East compared to the preceding centuries as well as probably to today (Issar and Zohar 2007, 194, 205; Finné et al. 2011, 3186; Enzel et al. 2003). This curve turned around ad 50 (Issar and Zohar 2007, 213), and by the third century average precipitation had dropped markedly below the historical average (Issar and Zohar 2007, 214). After a relatively benign start to the fourth century, dry conditions prevailed in the period ca. 350–470, when a comparably moist climate again returned and—briefly interrupted by the climate crises in the years after 536, lasted at least until the turn of the eighth century (Enzel et al. 2003; Issar and Zohar 2007, 215–216; Finné et al. 2011, 3186; Izdebski et al. 2016), when a long period of difficult climatic conditions started (Issar and Zohar 2007, 217; Enzel et al. 2003; Izdebski et al. 2016).

Scholarship on the Roman Near East is arguably more indebted to the traditions of classical and oriental philology, biblical studies, and classical archaeology than to landscape archaeology,

social anthropology, ethnography, and environmental history, which have had more impact on Bronze Age archaeology in the region. Nevertheless, most syntheses and a number of shorter works address the dynamics between "the desert and the sown," even if often in passing. While climate and its effect on subsistence are at the core of these discussions, the role of climate change has received only negligible attention and tends to focus on the relations between nomads and the settled.

This stands in contrast to the wider field of Near Eastern archaeology, where climate change is hotly debated as an agent of historical change, especially with regard to the Neolithic Revolution, the Bronze Age crises ca. 2200 bc and ca. 1200 bc, and also in the overall history of the region, including the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The argument for climate change as a driver of historical change in the Near East was first formulated by Ellsworth Huntington in his *Palestine and Its Transformation* (1911). Known as the founder of climate determinism as a historical paradigm, Huntington's theories remained influential until after World War II, when the large-scale expansion of agricultural lands especially in Israel, but also in Syria and Jordan, contributed toward shifting emphasis to human agency in the man–environment equation (Issar and Zohar 2007, 1–10; Rosen 2007, 1–31; van de Noort 2013, 20–23). Modern interest in climate change has revived the discussion (Rubin 1989; Brown 2005; Rosen 2007; Kerner, Dann, and Bangsgaard 2015), leading even to the emergence of a self-proclaimed neo-deterministic school (Issar and Zohar 2007, 1–10). While there is broad consensus on the importance of climate in shaping living conditions in the Near East and on the potential for even relatively modest climate change to influence subsistence patterns over time, there is no agreement on the role of climate change in the history of the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Scholars leaning toward neo-determinism will, without denying the potential and tendency of humans to adapt to changing conditions, nevertheless emphasize correlation between observable climate change and historical development. Examples include the more benevolent climate in the Hellenistic period and increased urbanization, a dry spell in the third century and the demise of Palmyra, as well as the return of humid conditions in late antiquity and the expansion of agriculture (Hirschfeld 2006; Issar and Zohar 2007, 193–219; Izdebski et al. 2016; Witakowski 2010; Lichtenberger et al. 2021; Raja and Seland 2022; Campany Jiménez et al. 2022). Others, without thereby denying that climate fluctuated and that this would influence living conditions, warn that the resolution of climate data is too low, that data are partly contradictory, correlations weak, and other factors, such as climate adaptation, predictable security situation, and market access, might have been more important in determining settlement and subsistence in situations when climate changes must be characterized as modest (Rosen 2000; Rubin 1989; Rosen 2007, 165–168; Lawrence et al. 2016; Vaiglova et al. 2020). In striking the balance between environmental and socio-economic factors in determining the relative extent and strength of government/nomad control and settled/pastoral lifestyle, it might also be useful to keep in mind that even if the two have often been in competition, they also depend on each other: increased rainfall would strengthen the pastoral economy as well as the agricultural. Dry years would affect livestock as well as agricultural yields.

Conclusion

Affirming that geography and climate influenced settlement and subsistence in the Hellenistic and Roman period as they do today is stating the obvious. Exactly because of this, any serious discussion of the history of the region needs to take geography and climate into account. Even

if there is not full agreement or sufficient data on the climatic fluctuations within the almost millennial time range in question, and substantial environmental degradation has taken place since ca. 1950, modern and colonial-period records of climate, vegetation, and land remain useful yardsticks in approaching historical and archaeological dynamics. In some parts of the region, there is a sharp transition between desert, steppe, and agricultural lands; in other parts the transition is very gradual with corresponding and overlapping zones of subsistence and settlement. Awareness of these transitions is necessary to interpret the changing historical landscape of the Near East, and to balance environment and human agency in the historical narrative of the region.

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VISUAL ARTS AND COINAGE FROM THE REGION

CHAPTER 5

ART IN HELLENISTIC SYRIA

ACHIM LICHTENBERGER

Visual Art in the Hellenistic Period

In antiquity, the term "art" (Greek *techne*) did not have the same meaning as today (Pollitt 1974). While the modern use has an inherent notion of independent artists who seek to express their own individuality, the Greek term referred to craftsmen who used their skills to please their customers. Even so, the individuality of certain artists and their contribution to artworks were acknowledged and artists were known by their names.

The Hellenistic period is defined as the time between the death of Alexander the Great (323 bc) and the Battle of Actium (31 bc). It began with the emergence of the Hellenistic kingdoms and ended with the dissolution of the last of the major Hellenistic kingdoms, the Ptolemaic kingdom, through Rome's intervention. Syria was the core region of the Seleucid realm with Antioch in northern Syria as its capital. During the third century bc, the Ptolemies ruled over large parts of the southern Levant, until the Seleucids took over this part as well. Most parts of Syria remained under Seleucid control until the first century bc.

Any modern epochal division can of course be contested: politically, in Syria, the Seleucid kingdom ended with the establishment of the Roman province of Syria in 64/63 bc. Culturally, Greek influence in Syria was already strong before the Hellenistic period, and Hellenism in Syria goes well into the early Islamic period (Bowersock 1990). This chapter covers the period 323–31 bc and focuses on monumental sculpture, mosaics, wall decoration, and selected minor arts. These genres of art were part of elite and official representational culture and to a large extent were embellishments found in public spaces, sanctuaries, and domestic buildings.

The choice of art genres that are discussed here is eclectic and has a strong classicist, colonial, and Western bias. Covered is the artwork that was heavily influenced by Greek artists, and this came with Greek political dominion. The author is fully aware of that and of a marginalization of more local, "indigenous" art. But because of the importance of these genres for elite cultural discourses in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, this approach is deemed appropriate.

Artists of Hellenistic Syria

In Hellenistic Syria, several artists are known by name. Some of them were native to Syria; others were attracted by the Hellenistic court of the Seleucid kingdom. Most of the evidence stems from the metropoleis of northern Syria and the coastal cities. None of the artworks known from literature or inscriptions have come down to us.

FIGURE 5.1. Tyche of Antioch by Eutychides. Roman copy of an early Hellenistic work, Vatican Museums, inv. no. 2672 ©Wikipedia (Jastrow).

The most famous sculpture in the round in Hellenistic Syria is the Tyche of Antioch made by Eutychides, a Greek sculptor from Sicyon in the Peloponnese (fig. 5.1) (Meyer 2006). This sculpture was highly influential for the iconography of the goddess Tyche and had long-lasting impact, being copied and the type transformed for many centuries (DNO 2551–2553). Many replicas of the statue make it one of the best-documented artworks of the period. The statue depicted the divine personification of the city in its topographic layout with mountain and personified river; it was created in the early third century bc for the newly founded city of Antioch, the capital of the Seleucid empire. Although we know of other artworks of Eutychides, we have no information that any of them was commissioned for another city in Syria.

Another famous artist of the late classical to early Hellenistic period, Bryaxis from Caria, was active close to Antioch. At about the same time as Eutychides, he created the monumental acrolith cult statue of Apollon for the sanctuary at Daphne (DNO 2347–2355; Linfert 1983; Flashar 1992, 70–77). This statue is difficult to trace, but tetradrachms of a special issue of Antiochus IV minted in 166/165 bc in Antioch or in Daphne probably depicted this masterpiece (fig. 5.2) (Houghton et al. 2008, 62 and 65, no. 1401). Apollon was the dynastic god of the Seleucids. Bryaxis also made a statue of King Seleucus I, but we have no information about where it was erected (Plin., *HN* 34.73, DNO 2359).

FIGURE 5.2. Tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, 166/165 **BC**; Obv.: Laureate head of Apollon to r.; Rev.: Apollon with kithara to r.; Giessener Münzhandlung 71, Munich 1995, no. 393.

The third foreign artist known to be in Hellenistic Syria is a certain Hermocles of Rhodes, who was active around 300 bc, and according to Lucian, he made a bronze statue of Combabos in the sanctuary of Atargatis in Hierapolis (Lucian., *Syr. D.* 26; DNO 2629). Combabos was a mythical figure who was involved in the foundation of the sanctuary, together with the Seleucid queen Stratonike I. She was the wife of Seleucus I, and the king had given permission to erect

the statue of Combabos, underlining the royal patronage of the work (Lightfoot 2003, 384–417).

It is remarkable that only these three Greek artists are known to have worked in Hellenistic Syria. All of them were active in the early Hellenistic period and all of them were active in northern Syria within a royal Seleucid context. Bryaxis was already a famous artist and had worked in several places in the eastern Mediterranean before coming to Daphne. Eutychides became famous through the Tyche he made for Antioch.

In addition to the artists active in Syria, we have some information about artists stemming from Syria and working abroad. Most remarkable in this context is that there seems to have been a strong connection to Rhodes, which during the Hellenistic period was one of the centers of visual arts (Goodlett 1991, 669–681; Moreno 1994, 359–413). Technon from Sidon was a bronze sculptor active in the first half of the third century bc, and he worked on Rhodes (Lindos and Kamiros), its Peraia, and places close by (Loryma and Nisyros) (DNO 2660–2663).

A considerable group of artists came from Tyre and worked on Rhodes. Their activity stretched from the second half of the second century bc to the first century bc and involved artists named Artemidoros, Menodotos, Charmolas, and Talestes (Dow 1941, 351–360; Lippold 1950, 377–378; Goodlett 1991, 677–678; Badoud 2010, 125–143).

Also active in Rhodes was a group of artists in the early first century bc. They originated from Antioch, probably Antioch at the Orontes (although this is not completely certain). Agathokles (DNO 3871–3872), Satyros (DNO 3873–3874), and Troilos (DNO 3875–3878) were sculptors and bronze workers who had been attracted by the famous workshops in Rhodes and they seem to have been quite productive, as attested by inscriptions identifying their works.

The artists originating from Hellenistic Syria and working abroad suggest that Hellenistic Syria was no backwater of Hellenistic art production but had local artists in some of the major cities of northern Syria and Phoenicia. These artists were mobile, making their fortune in Rhodes. The artists produced primarily sculpture, but we also know of a certain Aristobulos from Syria, who was a painter worthy of note and probably worked in the early Hellenistic period (Plin., *HN* 35.146; DNO 3042). We have no information about his output or where he was active.

Monumental Sculpture

Monumental sculpture in the Hellenistic period was usually made of stone, preferably marble, or bronze. Since bronze was already being recycled in antiquity, very few bronze sculptures from the Hellenistic period were uncovered in Syria, although we have to assume that it was the preferred material for sculpture (Wenning 1983, 118; Erlich 2009 29–40; Gergel 1991, 231–251; Fleischer 1991, X).

Marble was not local to Syria, so all the marble for statues was imported from marble production centers in the eastern Mediterranean such as Greece and Asia Minor. The knowledge for working marble was a skill that was not necessarily available at local workshops used to working in limestone or basalt. An exceptional unfinished Hellenistic marble sculpture from Akko shows the result when an unskilled workshop tried to work marble and ended up with stylistic features known from carving local limestone sculpture (Erlich 2009, 12). Therefore, when marble was imported, artisans generally came with it, bringing their sculpting skills and knowledge of Greek forms and styles. Because marble is so heavy, most sculptures did not travel far from the coast and therefore larger amounts of marble sculpture are

restricted to coastal cities. A widespread distribution of marble products in the Near East is a phenomenon only of the Roman period (Fischer 1998).

Marble sculptures had been imported to Phoenicia since the classical period, e.g., to the sanctuary of Eshmun in Bustan es-Sheich near Sidon (Stucky 1993). We know that sarcophagi came to Sidon—for example, the famous, late classical *Klagefrauensarkophag* or the already early Hellenistic "Alexander Sarcophagus" (von Graeve 1970; Fleischer 1983). There is not much other evidence for imported marble sculpture during the early Hellenistic period, but later in the Hellenistic period, Antioch, and also other sites further away from the Mediterranean coast such as Dura Europos and Mesopotamia, yielded some evidence for Hellenistic marble sculptures (Najbjerg 2001, 182–184, nos. 49–50; Invernizzi 2009). The head of a woman with a mural crown from Susa even has an inscription, mentioning the sculptor, a certain Antiochos, son of Dryas (Invernizzi 2017, 278 n. 23). The prominent positioning of the signature of the artist on the head of the sculpture—a placement that in a Greek context would be uncommon—suggests explicit pride in owning a marble sculpture that was made by a Greek artist (Pfrommer 2009, 124). These marble sculptures belong to the second and first centuries bc. Also created in the second century bc is the marble head of Alexander the Great from Beth Shean, as were several other marble objects found in the southern Levant, but again mostly on the coast (Wenning 1983, 105–118; Tal 2009, 85–90). In northern Syria, fragments of a Hellenistic acrolith statue in Parian marble were uncovered at the temple of Jebel Khalid (Clarke 2015, 148–149).

In general, there is not much marble sculpture from the Hellenistic period in Syria, and with few exceptions most of it is restricted to coastal sites. Non-marble stone sculpture from the Hellenistic period is difficult to track because these sculptures, of which quite a large corpus is preserved in several regions of Syria, are hard to date. It seems that only in the late Hellenistic period did such sculptures become common, and Michael Blömer in his study on north Syrian sculpture even suggests that local sculpture is a phenomenon of the Roman period, implying that such sculpture became more commonplace only under Roman influence (Blömer 2014, 183; see also Bolelli 1986, 324–329; Erlich 2009, 13–27; Clarke 2015, 149–151). But again, regional differentiation is necessary, since on the Phoenician coast there is a tradition of producing reliefs and sculptures in local stone, as can be seen in Umm el-Amed or in Bustan es-Sheich (Dunand and Duru 1962, 143–180; Stucky 1993, 72–75; see also Frede 2002, 64–65). These sculptures often blend Greek and local styles; sometimes as in Umm el-Amed Egyptian iconography or in Bustan es-Sheich, Cypriote influences can be detected as well. In other cases, the sculptures are purely Greek in style—for example, the Nike from Dor, attributed to the third/second century bc (Stewart and Martin 2003, 125). Marisa in Idumaea has yielded some quite remarkable local chalk sculptures from the Hellenistic period that are difficult to date and to interpret, merging Hellenistic and local features (fig. 5.3) (Erlich 2009, 14–22).

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FIGURE 5.3. Hellenistic head made of chalk from Marisa (subterranean complex 169), IAA registration no. 3567/02 169-19-380, Maresha excavations, Ian Stern and Adi Erlich, photo by Maria Bukin.

Some of the sculptures display a very schematic and abstract style with reduced depiction of facial features. In northern Syria, the royal sculptures of late Hellenistic Commagene with its most famous site Nemrud Dag are an exception not only in their monumentality but also in their iconography, being influenced by Greek and Iranian models (Brijder 2014; see also Kropp 2013, 83–87; Versluys 2017).

In Iraq el-Amir in Transjordan, the Qasr al-Abd, a Hellenistic palace built around 200 BC, was decorated with monumental reliefs of animals (Will and Larché 1991). The reliefs were executed in limestone and they are remarkable because the building belonged to the Jewish priestly family of the Tobiads. Jews during this period were supposed to be reluctant to depict living creatures, especially anthropomorphic figures, but animals in some contexts were accepted (Lichtenberger 2009b, 71–97). The Tobiad family sided with the Ptolemies against the Seleucids and the Qasr al-Abd was heavily influenced by Ptolemaic art and style, and this political dependence probably explains the adoption of the motifs. Hellenistic monumental reliefs are very rare in Hellenistic Syria. Other examples of monumental Hellenistic sculpture are the second-century BC reliefs from Ashrafiye close to Pella in Transjordan (Thiel 2007, 354–359).

In general, the preserved evidence for sculpture in Hellenistic Syria remains sparse. Most of the marble sculpture of the early Hellenistic period seems to be restricted to coastal centers and to northern Syria and from there only later reached deeper into mainland Syria and Mesopotamia. Difficulties working with marble (and the lost bronze) sculptures possibly triggered the production of local limestone and basalt sculptures in Syria in the late Hellenistic period although it needs to be emphasized that monumental sculpture was produced in some areas such as Phoenicia before the Hellenistic period.

Mosaics

During the Hellenistic period, tessellated mosaics became common in the Mediterranean. Although Syria is a center of mosaic production in the Roman period, Hellenistic mosaics are very rare, occurring mainly in the southern Levant (Dunbabin 1999, 160–161 and 187). One of the earliest mosaics stems from mid- to late second-century BC coastal Dor, where a polychrome mosaic with comic masks and a floral design was uncovered (Stewart and Martin 2003, 132–141). Attributed to the second/first century BC are black and white mosaics that were found at Tel Anafa in the hinterland of Tyre (Herbert 1994). Combined with the mosaics in Tel Anafa were *opus signinum* floors, and this technique is typical for the Punic realm, suggesting that in the hinterland of Tyre some kind of local (Punic-Phoenician) influence can be traced (Erlich 2009, 88–90; see also Vassal 2006, 39–44 and 106).

Polychrome mosaic floors are also known from the Hasmonean palaces in Jericho dating to the first century BC but their quality is not very high (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 77, no. 111). Toward the end of the Hellenistic period, the palaces of Herod the Great yielded many mosaics and *opus sectile* floors, some of them influenced by an eastern Hellenistic tradition, others by upcoming western (Roman) models (Lichtenberger 2009a, 43–62). A similar combination of eastern Mediterranean polychrome mosaics and western black and white mosaics is encountered in late Hellenistic Commagene, where such mosaics have been unearthed in Arsameia at the Nymphaios and in the palace of Samosata (Bingöl 1997, 106–110; Kropp 2013, 107–109).

Mosaics had no local pre-Hellenistic tradition in Syria and therefore the few mosaics that are extant rely on Mediterranean models. The Tel Anafa *opus signinum* might be a special case, placing the floors in a particular Punic-Phoenician cultural milieu. In the Hellenistic period, mosaics are rare in Syria and until now are not known to exist before the second century bc.

Wall Decoration

Wall paintings and stucco friezes are part of the interior decoration of domestic and public buildings and also used in sepulchres. A characteristic of Hellenistic wall decoration is the combination of wall painting and stucco, well known from the so-called First Pompeian Style ("Masonry Style"), an architectural style that was widespread in the eastern Mediterranean (Ling 1991, 12). These wall decorations usually lack figurative scenes and display geometric and architectural, sometimes floral, decor.

A study of Hellenistic wall decoration in Hellenistic Syria is still a research desideratum, but in several places fragments have been found; they offer the typical "Masonry Style," often in combination with lavish stucco work. In the southern Levant there is a good bit of evidence for "Masonry Style" wall decoration in private and public contexts of the second and first centuries bc. The main areas of influence, and from where the inspiration stems, seem to be Alexandria and Carthage. Fragments of "Masonry Style" have been unearthed at Jericho, Tel Anafa, Ptolemais-Akko, and Marisa; Petra, Beth Shean, and coastal sites such as Anthedon and Berytos have also yielded such evidence (Rozenberg 2008, 298–309; Kidd 2018, 29–32; Ashkenazi et al. 2021). Remarkable is the occurrence of "Masonry Style" in the Hellenistic sanctuary of Zeus Olympios in Gerasa, attesting to the use of such decoration also in public contexts (Rozenberg 2008, 306–309). In the late Hellenistic period, the palaces of Herod the Great provide a wealth of stucco and painted wall decoration in "Masonry Style" and in the upcoming so-called Second Pompeian Style (Rozenberg 2008).

In northern Syria only a few remains of Hellenistic wall paintings have been found (and published), most notably in Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates. In the "Acropolis Palace" and in the housing area, many fragments of "Masonry Style" decoration have been uncovered. They date to the second and first centuries bc and in the housing insula even parts of a figurative frieze were uncovered. It has been suggested that the wall decoration is influenced by eastern Mediterranean models as attested in Macedonia and Delos (Jackson 2009, 231–253; 2016, 259–268). The late Hellenistic palace in Samosata in Commagene yielded a substantial number of fragments of wall decoration that can be related to the so-called Second Pompeian Style (Bingöl 1997, 111–118).

The most important paintings from Hellenistic tombs in Syria stem from Marisa, where several tombs of the third century bc have been explored (Jacobson 2007; Erlich 2009, 61–85). The hypogea from Marisa are of an Alexandrian type and so is the wall decoration. The mid-third-century bc "Tomb I" has a hunting scene and exotic animals as well as Ptolemaic eagles. These tombs are important evidence for Ptolemaic influence in third-century bc Palestine. Until now, no other Hellenistic tombs with notable wall paintings have been uncovered in Syria.

So-called Minor Arts

Any choice of art genre is eclectic and dependent on the definition of art. In this contribution, the focus has hitherto been on ancient genres of art that are monumental or large scale and

often can be connected with artists who signed their artworks, such as sculpture, painting, and mosaics. However, in antiquity, other artworks were sometimes signed, such as toreutics, glass, and coins and thus regarded as art.

Work in precious materials with clear provenance from Hellenistic Syria is rare, but Achaemaenid Iran had a long tradition of such production, and a considerable number of such objects have survived to the present (Pfrommer 1993). Some of the objects can be related to Seleucid court art and therefore it can be assumed that these objects were available also in Hellenistic Syria. Two first-century bc rhyta in Malibu even display signatures of artists (Pfrommer 1993, 186–187, no. 71 and 190–191, no. 73). The language of the signatures is Aramaic but the habit of signing is Greek, underlining the adoption of Greek artistic habits. Exquisite jewelry is also well documented in Syria although there is no proof yet that such objects were indeed produced in Syria (Pfrommer 1990).

Glass was fabricated in Egypt and the Near East in the pre-Hellenistic periods. Thanks to the rich deposits of silica-based sand at the Levantine coast, the region was a center of glass production. Vessels typical of the second century bc were mold-made, hemispherical bowls with a flat or ribbed surface. By the end of the Hellenistic period, in the mid-first century bc an important technological innovation arose in the southern Levant: the invention of glass blowing (tube blowing) which made glass production much more efficient and industrial (von Saldern 2004, 218–223). It is this milieu from which in the early Roman period extraordinary glass workshops emerged in Phoenicia such as the one owned by Ennion (Lightfoot 2014). His mold-blown products were traded throughout the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

In Hellenistic Syria, no signed coins were minted, but it needs to be emphasized that many Hellenistic coin types, especially the royal and civic tetradrachms on large flans, displayed an artistic and technical quality that clearly allows for a qualification as artworks (fig. 5.2). Seleucid royal portraiture often had an expressive style giving the impression of an individual character sketch and some of the die cutters can be regarded as artists. Related to the production of coins is the cutting of seals. Seals were used in official and private contexts for administrative and legal issues and some of the seals offer artistic depictions. Although it is difficult to assign seals to specific Syrian workshops, large assemblages of Hellenistic seal impressions (bullae) have been unearthed in Doliche, Kedesh, Beth Shean, and Marisa, and Mesopotamia has also yielded large complexes in Seleucia on the Tigris and Uruk (Schreiber 2023). Some of the seals are artistic masterpieces cut in stone; others are at least reflections of the artistic landscape belonging to the visual program of Hellenistic Syria (Herbert 2008, 257–272).

Terracotta figurines are a group of mass-produced artifacts that are not necessarily regarded as objects of high artistic quality, although, for example, late classical and early Hellenistic so-called Tanagra figurines have quite some artistic appeal, combining advanced techniques of multi-mold production with sophisticated formal types. Mold-made figurines have a long tradition in Syria, starting in the Bronze Age and continuing at least into the Byzantine period. In the pre-Hellenistic period, figurines were usually plaquettes from a single mold (or hand-made). Double or multi-molded figurines were produced under Greek influence. Figurines were often used in private worship within houses, tombs, and sanctuaries. Because of the long tradition of producing and using such objects in Syria, the motifs as well as the formal and stylistic models were often strongly persistent. Therefore, coroplastic artifacts in Hellenistic Syria sometimes display characteristics that are only slightly Hellenized. Important assemblages of Hellenistic figurines were found, for example, in well-excavated sites in the southern Levant such as Marisa and Kharayeb (close to Tyre) (Chéhab 1951–1954; Erlich 2009, 41–60). Again, a mixture of local, Greek, and Egyptian artistic influences can be detected in these objects. In northern Syria, fewer Hellenistic figurines have been reported so far, with some from Dura

Europos. In northern Syria, figurines seem to have been influenced strongly from Mesopotamia, where places like Uruk and Seleucia on the Tigris yielded such objects (Downey 2003, 8–21).

Hellenistic Syrian Art?

When looking at art in Hellenistic Syria, it is clear that there is not one characteristic Syrian art but that a regional and chronological differentiation is necessary. A challenge in looking at Hellenistic Syria is that the south is much better explored than the north, with more excavations undertaken in the south. This situation distorts the picture, giving the impression that the south is richer in art than the north. Such an impression clearly is false, since from literary sources we know of the importance of the cities in the north, particularly of the so-called Tetrapolis. These cities were important urban centers of the Seleucid kingdom.

Thus, there is more archaeological evidence for Hellenistic art in the south. However, it is obvious that most textual evidence for the early Hellenistic period indeed relates to northern Syria and is based on royal (Seleucid) patronage. During the early Hellenistic period the southern Levant was under Ptolemaic rule and therefore the third-century bc evidence in the south is markedly influenced by Ptolemaic culture.

In the second century bc an increase in Hellenistic artworks can be detected in Syria, but it is the late Hellenistic period that provides the most evidence. It seems that the late Hellenistic period is the formative period—at least in the archaeological record—for the rich artistic culture that later characterizes Roman Syria.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that art in Hellenistic Syria was often the result of merging local traditions with influences from the western Mediterranean, but also with a mix of Egyptian, Cypriote, Mesopotamian, and Iranian material culture. This blend of cultural influences was the result of a well-connected Hellenistic world and of the positioning of Syria in the center of the vast Seleucid kingdom.

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CHAPTER 6

COINAGE IN HELLENISTIC SYRIA

OLIVER D. HOOVER

Syria

Unlike the Phoenician coast to the south, which had a tradition of coin production going back to the mid-fifth century BC, Syria was a relative latecomer to locally struck coinage. The earliest coins produced in Syria proper were struck by the priest-dynasts of Manbog (Hierapolis-Bambyce) in the second half of the fourth century BC. These frequently reflect the typological influences of Tarsus in Cilicia and Sidon in Phoenicia, the two major satrapal capitals that Syria was sandwiched between. The level of production at Manbog was quite low and the primary purpose of the coins was probably to make tribute payments to the Persian treasury rather than to monetize the local economy (Andrade 2017).

After the Battle of Issus (333 bc) won Syria for the expanding Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great, an imperial mint was opened at Damascus, probably in 326/325 bc, to coin the city's captured Persian treasure into tetradrachms with the Heracles and Zeus types that became standard for Alexander's imperial coinage (Price 1991, 398–401; Taylor 2017) (fig. 6.1)

FIGURE 6.1. Silver Alexandrine tetradrachm of Damascus (330–320 **BC**). ANS 1947.98.271.

The island city of Aradus (Arwad) also struck the king's imperial types for Alexander's successors in Syria, although it had previously produced its own coinage under its Phoenician kings in the late fifth and early fourth centuries bc (Duyrat 2005). Again, however, these coins were not really struck for use in the Syrian economy. The hoard evidence and the probable date of production indicates that coins were primarily used to pay out soldiers returning home or moving to other garrisons at the end of their service in Alexander's eastern campaigns.

Seleucus I and the Monetization of Syria

The extensive monetization of the Syrian economy did not really begin until after the region was claimed by Alexander's former general, Seleucus I (320–281 BC), and he embarked upon an ambitious program of urbanization. He founded the Syrian Tetrapolis, consisting of Antioch on the Orontes, Seleucia in Pieria, Apamea on the Axios, and Laodicea by the Sea, all probably in ca. 300 BC, which became a center for coin production in Syria over the decades and centuries that followed.

Under Seleucus I, gold staters and silver tetradrachms and fractions were struck at Antioch, Seleucia, and Laodicea following closely on the model of Alexander's coinage (*SC* 1.1, nos. 12–13, 29–31, 36–37). The same Attic weight standard (ca. 17.2 g to the tetradrachm) employed by Alexander was retained for both gold and silver, as were the respective Athena/Nike and Heracles/Zeus types, in part because these were the types to which mercenaries had become accustomed. The only noticeable differences were the replacement of Alexander's name with that of Seleucus and, at Antioch and Seleucia, the replacement of the eagle normally held by Zeus with the figure of Nike, possibly alluding to the watchword at the Battle of Issus ("Alexander and Victory") or to Seleucus's cult title, Nikator ("the Victor") (Hoover 2019, 138) (fig. 6.2).

FIGURE 6.2. Silver Alexandrine tetradrachm of Seleucus I, Seleucia in Pieria (300–298 **BC**). ANS 1977.158.629.

Aradus and/or Marathus in the Aradian *peraea* were long thought to have struck Alexandrine issues for Seleucus I, but these are now known to have been struck in Babylonia between ca. 320 and 305 bc, before his acquisition of Syria (*SC* 1.1, 34–35 with nos. 66–37 and 479–480 with nos. Ad39–Ad40).

The reign of Seleucus I also saw the introduction of a fiduciary bronze coinage to aid in daily small monetary transactions and to increase minting profits: the face value of the coins was much greater than the value of the bronze used to make them and they replaced easily lost small silver fractions. While Aradus had produced brief bronze coinages under its kings and in the name of Alexander the Great (Duyrat 2005, nos. 133–134) and Sidon had experimented

with bronze in the mid-fourth century (Elayi 2004, nos. 1466–1519, 2321–2608), Seleucus's bronze coinage, primarily struck at Antioch, was the first ever produced in Syria proper.

Brief emissions of civic bronze coins (i.e., coins lacking royal iconography and carrying the city ethnic rather than the name of the king) were also struck at Seleucia and Antioch (*WSM*, nos. 896–898, 910). It is unclear whether these represent a special dispensation, perhaps in connection with the construction of the cities, during the lifetime of Seleucus I, or a rebel coinage struck during the revolt in northern Syria that broke out upon his death. In either case, no further civic coinage was produced in Syria until the mid-second century BC. Until then, Syrian coinage was essentially synonymous with royal Seleucid coinage.

Dynastic and Personal Coinage

The character of the coinage began to change under Seleucus's son and successor, Antiochus I (281–261 BC). Whereas Seleucus I had introduced personal elements and types on the silver and especially the bronze coinage struck in Syria, Antiochus I took early steps to remodel it as a fully dynastic coinage. Probably by 278 BC, tetradrachms struck at Antioch abandoned the old types of Alexander in favor of new ones featuring the diademed portrait of Antiochus I on the obverse and an image of Apollo seated on the omphalos, holding his bow and testing an arrow (*SC* 1.1, no. 335). These types seem to have been devised at Seleucia on the Tigris at the opening of Antiochus's reign before they were disseminated to Antioch and the other cities of the Seleucid Empire (Iossif 2011, 268–271). Nevertheless, this change had no effect on Laodicea, which continued to produce Alexandrine tetradrachms in the name of Seleucus I down to the reign of Seleucus II (246–225 BC), apparently for use in external trade and the payment of foreign mercenaries requiring the established Heracles and Zeus types of Alexander the Great (Houghton 1999).

In general, precious metal coin production in Syria under the early successors of Seleucus I was very modest, involving six or less observed obverse dies per king at Antioch until the reign of Antiochus III (222–187 bc). This may be explained by the Seleucid policy that made Syria proper (and the Seleucid Empire as a whole, excluding the later additions of Phoenicia and southern Coele Syria) an open currency zone, in which silver coins from almost anywhere could circulate so long as they were struck to the Attic weight standard. Thus, it is very common to find coins of Lysimachus, the Antigonid kings of Macedon, and especially posthumous Alexander tetradrachms of various cities of Asia Minor in Syrian hoards alongside royal Seleucid issues struck at Antioch or Laodicea (Le Rider and de Callataÿ 2006, 85–96, 116–122). In this context there was little need to issue large quantities of silver coin from the Syrian mints except to support major campaigns in the region (e.g., the several invasions of Ptolemaic Phoenicia and southern Coele Syria by Antiochus III).

The new tetradrachms of Antiochus I set the model for Seleucid silver in Syria and throughout the empire for more than a century. Except for Seleucus II, who adopted a standing figure of Apollo as his reverse type, tetradrachms struck by the successors of Antiochus I down to the time of Antiochus IV (175–164 bc) regularly depicted the king on the obverse and seated Apollo on the reverse (fig. 6.3).

FIGURE 6.3. Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus I, Antioch on the Orontes (280–261 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.75047.

Likewise, following the precedent set by Antiochus I, the bulk of the Seleucid bronze coinage struck in Syria in the third and early second centuries bc featured types related to Apollo, who was identified as the patron deity of the dynasty and the divine father of Seleucus I (Erickson 2 019).

After an initial tetradrachm series featuring Apollo on the reverse, Antiochus IV replaced the dynastic god with the image of Zeus at Antioch (and Ake-Ptolemaïs in Phoenicia), as a personal type and a means of distinguishing new coins, which were struck to a reduced Attic standard of ca. 16.70 g (fig. 6.4).

FIGURE 6.4. Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV, Antioch on the Orontes (173–168 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.75257.

Although this reduction has been previously linked to the supposed poor finances of the Seleucid Empire under the weight of Roman indemnity payments, this view has been forcefully challenged in light of evidence to the contrary and the fact that an empire-wide financial problem does not explain a weight reform specific to Antioch (Le Rider and de Callataÿ 2006, 199–204). The reduction may have more to do with an influx of circulated posthumous Alexander tetradrachms from southern Asia Minor.

After Antiochus IV, reverse types featuring Zeus (enthroned or standing) became a common feature of Seleucid silver tetradrachms in Syria although distinct personal types, such as the Tyche of Demetrius I, the Dioscuri of Antiochus VI, and the helmet of Tryphon also occur, reflecting the disintegration of dynastic unity.

Quasi-municipal and Civic Coinage

The role of the Syrian cities in Seleucid coin production is almost invisible from the reign of Antiochus I to Seleucus IV, except at Laodicea, where a dolphin symbol was regularly applied as a mint mark to the coinage produced there (*SC* 1.1, nos. 357–358, 576). This tendency toward Syrian civic invisibility began to change under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. During his reign, in addition to royal Seleucid silver and bronze types, Antioch, Seleucia, Apamea, and Laodicea, all struck a new kind of bronze coinage featuring the portrait of the king on the obverse and a civic type (e.g., Poseidon at Laodicea, a thunderbolt at Seleucia) on the reverse together with a legend or mint mark naming the city (*SC* 2.1, nos. 1416–1417, 1425–1431). This coinage is commonly known as "quasi-municipal" due to its dual royal and civic flavor.

Syrian quasi-municipal coinage seems to have developed out of a Phoenician tradition of pairing the head of the king with local reverse types that can be traced back to the reign of Antiochus III. Under Antiochus IV the custom flourished in Phoenicia and traveled north into Syria proper. It has been suggested that quasi-municipal coinage was introduced in Syria out of the king's desire to share the profits from the fiduciary bronze coinage with the cities (Mørkholm 1966, 125–130), but the phenomenon also reflects the development of a greater civic consciousness. This evolved further in the reign of the Seleucid pretender Alexander I (150–146 bc), with the production of new Syrian quasi-municipal bronze coinages at Antioch, Seleucia, and Apamea (*SC* 2, nos. 1788–1789, 1799–1800, 1803–1804, 1806–1808) (fig. 6.5), as well as at Cyrrhus, a city of northern Syria founded by Seleucus I, but which seems to have struck no coinage previously (*SC* 2, no. 1809). Even more remarkable under Alexander I is the simultaneous but brief emergence of true civic bronze coinages at Antioch, Seleucia, and Apamea (*BMC Galatia*, 223, no. 1 and 270, nos. 11–13; Hoover 2018), as well as a coinage of the "Brother Peoples," apparently reflecting some form of alliance between Seleucia and Antioch (*BMC Galatia*, 151–152, nos. 1–11). Although certainly not equal to the kings, the cities were becoming more visible and influential partners in the royal administration of Syria.

FIGURE 6.5. Quasi-municipal bronze coin of Apamea on the Axios under Alexander I (150/149 **BC**). ANS 1992.54.1731.

Alexander I's royal tetradrachms struck at Seleucia also reveal the partnership between king and civic authorities in that the reverse does not depict dynastic Apollo or the Zeus type established by Antiochus IV, but rather the thunderbolt of Zeus Kasios, the patron deity of the city (*SC* 2, no. 1798). Similarly, his early royal bronze coins struck at Apamea to commemorate Antiochus IV, the supposed father of Alexander I, feature iconography related to Dionysus, the chief god of the city (*SC* 2, nos. 1883–1884). Apamean civic influence is also detectable in the Dionysiac types used for the early royal coinage of the child usurper Antiochus VI (148–142/141 bc), who rose to power with the support of the disgruntled military class of Apamea

(*SC* 2, nos. 2008–2010 and 2012). Iconography related to the cities also crops up on later royal bronze coinages struck at Seleucia under Alexander II (128–123 bc) and Demetrius III (97/96–88/87 bc) (*SC* 2, nos. 2239 and 2447) and most dramatically on the royal tetradrachms struck at Damascus under Demetrius III and Antiochus XIII (87/86–83/82 bc), which carry reverses featuring the city's old Semitic deities, Atargatis and Hadad (*SC* 2, nos. 2450–2451 and 2471–2472A) (fig. 6.6).

FIGURE 6.6. Silver tetradrachm of Demetrius III, Damascus (96/95 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.78009.

Foreign Coinage and Foreign Intervention in Syria

While Syria was an open currency zone in the early Hellenistic period, two major movements of foreign coin into the region can be discerned in the second century BC.

The first of these involves posthumous Alexander tetradrachms of Aspendus, Perge, and Phaselis and autonomous tetradrachms of Side. After a period of circulation in southern Asia Minor, the coins were withdrawn and countermarked with punches featuring the anchor

emblem of the Seleucid dynasty before they poured into the Syrian economy. The hoard evidence suggests that this episode took place mid-170s BC and therefore these coins may represent money used to finance the entry of Antiochus IV into Syria (*SC* 2.2, 158–161).

A second major influx of foreign coin took place around 150 BC, when so-called wreathed tetradrachms struck by cities in western Asia Minor—especially Cyme and Myrina—began to appear in Syrian hoards (fig. 6.7).

FIGURE 6.7 Silver tetradrachm of Myrina (ca. 160–143 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.44224.

The fact that these coins rarely appear in hoards elsewhere tends to imply that they were struck with a Syrian destination in mind. The period during which these coins appear in Syrian hoards suggests that they may have been struck under Attalid influence as a means of supporting the pretender Alexander I against Demetrius I (Hoover and MacDonald 2000–2002; Psoma 2013).

The Age of Autonomy

By the late second century BC, the constant conflict between rival branches of the Seleucid dynasty created opportunities for cities to escape from royal authority and claim their autonomy. In 109 BC, Seleucia in Pieria became the first such autonomous city of Syria proper, although the island city of Aradus had actually negotiated its secession from the Seleucid Empire in 243/242 BC and regularly struck its own influential silver and bronze coinage down to the first century BC (Duyrat 2005). Damascus slipped away after the death of Antiochus XII, in 83/82 BC, while Laodicea by the Sea was granted autonomy in 80 BC.

In addition, several other Syrian cities that were not so fortunate as to claim full autonomy began to issue their own civic bronze coins, advertising their lesser status. The first of these seems to have been Antioch, whose coins began to describe the city as the "metropolis [of Syria]" (Butcher 2004, 308–312) in in 92/91 bc (fig. 6.8). Larisa on the Orontes followed suit in 86/85 bc, with coins describing the city as "sacred" (Nurpetlian 2020, 162, nos. 1–16).

FIGURE 6.8. Civic bronze coin of Antioch on the Orontes (89/88 **BC**). ANS 1948.19.1983.

Finally, in 77/76 bc, Apamea struck a civic bronze coinage indicating its status as "sacred and inviolable" (Nurpetlian 2020, 18, no. 1).

While there has been a long history of treating these issues and the bronze coins of the autonomous Syrian cities primarily as expressions of civic pride, it is clear that these coinages actually had a very important economic purpose. The issues of Larisa and Antioch begin at precisely the time that royal Seleucid bronze coinage—the primary source of small change in Syria since the third century—was coming to an end. Antioch ceased to strike royal bronze

coins in the year before its civic coinage began, and no attempt seems to have been made to provide royal coinage from other northern Syrian mints, except for an ephemeral issue of Demetrius III at Seleucia, probably in 88 bc (*SC* 2, no. 2447). With the Seleucids suddenly out of the business of bronze coin production in northern Syria, the civic coinages were a real necessity in order to maintain the regional pool of small change. In southern Syria, Damascus continued to produce royal Seleucid bronze coinage until the death of Antiochus XII, its last resident king, in 83/82 bc (*SC* 2, nos. 2454–2457 and 2473–2483).

At the same time that the cities began to fill the bronze coinage void left by the late Seleucids, so too did two relatively new ethnic players in Syria: the Nabataean Arabs of the Transjordan and the Negev, and the Ituraeans, an Arab or Aramaean people of the Bekaa Valley. Unexpectedly freed of Seleucid rule by the death of Antiochus XII, the Damascenes became fearful that their city might fall into the hands of the Ituraeans and therefore handed themselves over to the Nabatean king, Aretas III (ca. 83–62 bc). Under Aretas, the city struck a royal coinage featuring his own diademed portrait on the obverse—essentially continuing the Damascene numismatic tradition of the late Seleucids (Barkay 2019, nos. 5–8). An initial Ituraean bronze coinage was struck in 73/72 bc, probably at Chalcis under Mount Libanus (Herman 2006).

An Armenian Interlude and the Coming of Rome

As part of the ongoing Third Mithridatic War (73–63 BC) between Mithridates VI of Pontus and the Romans, Mithridates's father-in-law, Tigranes II of Armenia, invaded Syria. He drove the Seleucid king, Antiochus XIII, out of Antioch on the Orontes and occupied Damascus. His presence at both cities had a numismatic impact. Seleucid silver coinage was suspended at Antioch and replaced by new royal tetradrachms and drachms featuring the distinctive portrait of the Armenian king on the obverse and a depiction of Eutychides's celebrated Tyche of the city on the reverse. A similar typology prevailed at Damascus under Tigranes, but the form of Tyche was specific to the city (Nercessian 2006). Interestingly, while Damascus also struck a royal bronze coinage for Tigranes with the same types as the silver, Antioch did not. Indeed, the civic coinage of Antioch and Apamea both ceased during the Armenian occupation, but it continued at Seleucia in Pieria. The reasons for the lacunae in the bronze issues of Antioch and Apamea are unclear.

In 69 bc, Armenian rule in Syria was broken by the Roman consul, L. Licinius Lucullus, who restored Antiochus XIII to his kingdom, which consisted of little more than the city of Antioch. When Pompey the Great arrived in the region five years later in order to annex Syria to Rome's growing empire, he thought better of Lucullus's original settlement and deposed Antiochus XIII, thereby terminating the Seleucid dynasty. Civic bronze coinage resumed at Antioch and Apamea almost immediately after the withdrawal of Tigranes II, and often featured the same types and legends of the years before the Armenian occupation. However, after Pompey's settlement, the coins reflected the end of the Seleucid dynasty by replacing the Seleucid Era (counting from October 312 bc) that they had traditionally used to express the year of issue with a new, so-called Pompeian Era (really an era of the province of Syria) counting from 64 bc. In contrast, autonomous cities like Seleucia in Pieria and Laodicea by the Sea simply resumed their bronze coinage with the civic era dating system (counting from the year that autonomy was granted) that they had used prior to the Armenian occupation.

Ironically, while the civic bronze coinage was at pains to erase the Seleucid past, under the Roman governors of Syria, the mint of Antioch resumed production of Seleucid royal silver coins. Between 57 and 13/12 bc, the city regularly struck tetradrachms imitating the old types and legends of Philip I, but with the addition of the issuing governor's initials or a so-called

Caesarean Era (really an era of civic autonomy) counting from 49/48 bc, the year that Antioch was granted its autonomy by Julius Caesar (*SC* 2.1, no. 2491) (fig. 6.9).

FIGURE 6.9. Silver posthumous Philip I tetradrachm with the monogram of C. Cassius Longinus, Antioch on the Orontes (53–52 **BC**). Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1970.218.

The Roman decision to resurrect Philip's types for Antiochene tetradrachms that would circulate throughout Syria is often interpreted in political terms: since Antiochus XIII had not been recognized by Pompey, from the Roman perspective, Philip I would have been the last legitimate Seleucid king to reign at Antioch (*RPC* I, 606). The reality may have been rather more pragmatic. Debasement, weight reduction, and extensive recoining of the Seleucid

tetradrachm under Philip I ensured that the silver coinages of previous reigns disappeared from circulation (Hoover 2011, 259–260). In the 60s and 50s BC, Philip's tetradrachms would have been the predominant circulating silver coins of northern Syria, making them the obvious choice for imitation.

Over the course of the first century BC, the weight standard of the imitation Philip tetradrachms struck at Antioch remained relatively stable around 15.45 g, whereas that of the civic tetradrachms of Laodicea—the only other silver coinage still struck at a Syrian mint—declined from an original standard of ca. 15 g, derived from neighboring Aradus, to ca. 14 g, a standard derived from Tyre. After 30/29 BC, Antioch was the only operating silver mint in Syria proper. It was destined to remain so until AD 215–217, when numerous supplementary mints were opened in the region to support the Parthian war of Caracalla.

Phoenicia

Like Aradus, the cities of Byblus, Sidon, and Tyre had a tradition of local silver stretching back to the fifth century BC (Elayi and Elayi 2003; 2009; 2014). This was based on a shekel of ca. 14 g, featured types related to the respective cities, and often named the local kings. When Alexander the Great entered the region in 333 BC, all of the cities and their kings submitted to the Macedonian conqueror with the exception of Tyre, which fell after a protracted siege. In the aftermath, the shekel coinage came to an end and new imperial mints were established in the Phoenician cities in order to provide the Attic-weight coinage expected by soldiers at the end of their service in Alexander's campaigns. Sidon and Tyre became important centers for the production of Alexander's tetradrachms, in part because they were major port cities from which discharged soldiers in the East would sail to reach their homes in Greece and Macedonia. There is some controversy over whether Ake in southern Phoenicia was another major mint for Alexander's tetradrachms, or whether the Phoenician letters that appear below the arm of Zeus on the reverse do not name the city, but rather abbreviate the name of ʻOzmilk, the last king of Tyre (Price 1991, 405–413; Elayi and Elayi 2009, 388–389).

The Phoenician cities continued to produce Attic-weight coins with Alexander's types during the Levantine conflicts of his former generals, but the monetary situation in the region changed after 312/311 BC, when Phoenicia and southern Coele Syria were annexed to the Egyptian kingdom of Ptolemy I.

The Ptolemies and the Closure of Phoenicia

As Egypt lacked its own silver resources, Ptolemy I took steps to protect his silver coinage from export by establishing his territory as a closed currency zone. This involved a reduction of the tetradrachm's weight, first to ca. 15.7 g and then to ca. 14.26 g in 294 BC, as well as a ban on the importation of Attic-weight coin into the kingdom (*CPE* 1.1, 37–46). The final reduced-weight tetradrachm coinage featured the diademed head of Ptolemy I on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse, and carried a legend naming him as the issuer. It derived its standard from the Phoenician shekel but was valued as a full tetradrachm within the Ptolemaic kingdom. This inflated value strongly discouraged the circulation of the coins beyond the borders of the kingdom since they would not be accepted elsewhere with the full value of a tetradrachm. This coinage became the model for the standard Ptolemaic tetradrachm until the end of the dynasty.

Ptolemy I probably made use of the posthumous Alexander mints at Sidon and Tyre/Ake-Ptolemais during his conflicts with Antigonus Monophthalmos in 320–315 BC (Price 1991, nos. 405–407). Far less problematic are the Phoenician-weight gold and silver coins struck for

Ptolemy I at Sidon and Tyre beginning in 294 BC (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 241–242 and 244–245). The former carry the initials of the city in Greek while the latter employ the club symbol of Heracles-Melqart, the patron deity of Tyre.

Under Ptolemy II, these two mints were responsible for recoining the Attic-weight silver that had previously circulated in the region as new Phoenician-weight coins (fig. 6.10).

FIGURE 6.10. Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy II, Tyre (262–261 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.76114.

In this way, Sidon and Tyre united all of Phoenicia to the closed currency zone of Egypt and set the region apart from Seleucid Syria to the north. This massive recoining has also been connected to financing Ptolemy II's involvements in the First and Second Syrian Wars (274–271 and 260–253 bc). The outbreak of the Second Syrian War also resulted in the opening of a third Ptolemaic mint at Ake (refounded as Ptolemaïs), which continued to strike gold and silver coins until the end of Ptolemy II's reign (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 637–657).

The Sinews of War

Following the massive and virtually continuous output under Ptolemy II, the mints of Sidon, Tyre, and Ake-Ptolemaïs were put to more focused use under Ptolemy III (246–222 BC), producing dated gold and silver coinage only in connection with the Third Syrian War (246–241 BC) and in 225/224 BC, perhaps in response to an abortive invasion by Seleucus III (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 812–882). Precious metal issues of the three Phoenician mints and mints in southern Coele Syria under the successors of Ptolemy III were also closely connected to military activity. The coinage under Ptolemy IV has been associated with the outbreak of the Fourth Syrian War (219–217 BC) and especially with celebratory bonuses following the victory over Antiochus III at Raphia (*CPE* 1.1, 911–939). Likewise, the Phoenician coinages of Ptolemy V (204–181 BC) are all related to the Fifth Syrian War (202–195 BC), an emergency so great that additional mints were opened at smaller cities like Berytus and Byblus to supplement the main Phoenician mints (Carlen and Lorber 2019).

Quasi-municipal Coinage

Antiochus III was victorious in the Fifth Syrian War and took possession of both Phoenicia and southern Coele Syria but then proceeded to do very little with them in terms of monetary policy. Although several Seleucid mobile military mints (primarily producing bronze) seem to have operated in the region during the conflict (*SC* 1.1, nos. 1084–1090), the Seleucid king made no subsequent attempt to integrate Phoenicia or southern Coele Syria into the open monetary zone of the Seleucid Empire at large; no Seleucid precious metal coins were struck at regular mints; and only a few bronze issues were produced. Bronze issues of Ake-Ptolemaïs follow the standard royal designs of Antioch, but the issues of Tyre carry the portrait of Antiochus III on the obverse, and distinctly civic types involving the parts of a warship or the club of Heracles-Melqart (*SC* 1.1, nos. 1078–1083). The Tyrian issues represent a break with the established tradition of Seleucid dynastic coinage in Syria, and by the reign of Antiochus IV they had evolved into a quasi-municipal coinage naming the Tyrians in Phoenician script. The Tyrian quasi-municipal series was soon joined by others struck at Berytus, Byblus, and Tripolis, and evolved into vehicles for Phoenician civic self-aggrandizement. Issues of Tyre and Sidon express supremacy over each other while Berytus describes itself as "holy" (Hoover 2004) (fig. 6.11).

FIGURE 6.11. Quasi-municipal bronze coin of Sidon under Demetrius I (161–150 **BC**). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Babelon 789.

The Return of Regular Silver Production

Under Seleucus IV (187–175 BC) and his successors down to the reign of Alexander I (150–146 BC), Ake-Ptolemaïs was tasked with producing Attic-weight royal tetradrachms, apparently to meet the needs of Seleucid garrisons and administrators who did not expect to be permanently stationed in Phoenicia and required payment in currency that would retain its value elsewhere in the empire. Occasional Attic-weight tetradrachms were also struck at Tyre and Sidon beginning in the 140s BC. After what appears to have been an abortive attempt by Antiochus V (163–161 BC) (*SC* 2.1, no. 1583), Alexander I—perhaps not coincidentally a Ptolemaic-backed pretender—introduced new Phoenician-weight issues featuring the head of the Seleucid king

and an eagle reverse type obviously derived from the Ptolemaic model at the major Phoenician mints (fig. 6.12).

FIGURE 6.12. Silver Phoenician-weight tetradrachm of Alexander I, Tyre (150/149 **BC**). ANS 1935.117.1104.

The Phoenician-weight issues of Alexander I and his successors tended to be struck to a lower standard than the contemporary full weight of the Ptolemaic tetradrachm (ca. 14.0–14.2 g rather than ca. 14.26 g).

Phoenician-weight Seleucid coins were struck first at Sidon and Tyre, but Byblus and Ake-Ptolemaïs later opened under Antiochus VI and Tryphon because Sidon and Tyre were denied to them by Demetrius II. The mint of Byblus closed after the destruction of Tryphon, but Ake-Ptolemaïs continued to produce Phoenician-weight issues alongside Tyre and Sidon into the second reign of Demetrius II (129–126 bc), after which Tyre seized its autonomy. Thereafter, Sidon and Ake-Ptolemaïs struck Phoenician-weight issues alone in the region until the last decade of the second century bc, when all Seleucid Phoenician-weight coinage and any real Seleucid authority in Phoenicia came to an end.

Autonomy and the Coming of Rome

As an autonomous city, Tyre continued to strike Phoenician-weight coinage following the basic model of the preceding Seleucid and Ptolemaic issues but replaced the traditional royal portrait with the head of Herakles-Melqart and adopted a new Greek legend naming the city as "holy and inviolable" (*BMC Phoenicia*, 233–253, nos. 44–245) (fig. 6.13).

FIGURE 6.13. Silver tetradrachm of Tyre (121/120 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.72746.

By the end of the second century BC, the Phoenician cities of Sidon, Berytus, and Tripolis had also obtained their autonomy during the conflict between Antiochus VIII and Antiochus IX. Like Tyre, they also struck new autonomous silver coins. Sidon followed Tyre in retaining the traditional Phoenician standard and typology but replaced the royal portrait with the head of the city's Tyche and the royal legend with one proclaiming Sidon also to be "holy and inviolable" (Levy 2000). The more northerly city of Tripolis, on the other hand, was drawn into the economic orbit of neighboring Aradus and struck its autonomous coinage on the Aradian standard of ca. 15.5 g. Like Tyre and Sidon, the new coinage also advertised Tripolis as "holy

and inviolable" but adopted the types of the Dioscuri and Tyche and employed a more Syrian than Phoenician style (*BMC Phoenicia*, 200–201, nos. 3–7) (fig. 6.14).

FIGURE 6.14. Silver tetradrachm of Tripolis (103/102 **BC**). ANS 1944.100.72515.

The Phoenician cities universally worked to erase the Seleucid past by dating their coinages according to their respective civic eras of autonomy rather than by the Seleucid Era, which had been established in the region for almost a century. The coinages and their dating also largely ignored the advent of Roman power in the region, unlike in Syria proper and southern Coele Syria, where "Pompeian" Era dates appear and occasionally types, legends, and monograms explicitly indicating Roman influence. The creation of Roman Syria probably played a role in the end of Tripolitan silver production in 65/64 bc, but Sidon continued to strike Phoenician-weight silver down to AD 43/44 and Tyre until AD 65/66 as if nothing had changed. Tyrian production was strongly influenced by Jewish demand for its silver, which was required to pay the Temple tax.

Like the Phoenician coast, southern Coele Syria had its own local silver coinage traditions predating the arrival of Alexander. Under the Persian administration, small fractions had been struck in Samaria and Judah (Jerusalem) for local use, while the Philistian cities of Ascalon, Ashdod, and Gaza had produced shekels and fractions on local standards related to those of the Phoenician cities (Meshorer and Qedar 1999; Meshorer 2001, 1–19; Gitler and Tal 2006). The Macedonian conquest seems to have put an end to the Samarian and Philistian coinages, but that of Judah adapted to the new situation, replacing the local standard with the Attic standard favored by Alexander for his imperial coinage.

The Ptolemaic Period

The region was occupied by Ptolemy I in 320–315 and 311/312 BC before it was completely absorbed into the Ptolemaic kingdom and its closed currency zone in 302/301 BC. During the second occupation, silver fractions with Ptolemy's Alexander the Great and Athena types were struck at an uncertain mint in Samaria or Judaea (*CPE* 1.1, no. 246). Following the final annexation, new fractional issues were struck at Jerusalem, first with types representing Alexander the Great and then, after 294 BC, with the standard Ptolemaic type featuring the diademed portrait of Ptolemy I and an eagle (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 250–254). These coins are remarkable in that they feature Ptolemy's royal iconography and yet seem to be struck to the Persic standard rather than the Phoenician Ptolemaic standard, and do not name the king in Greek, but rather name the province (*Yhdh*, Judah) in paleo-Hebrew script (Ronen 1998). Additional fractions were struck on the Ptolemaic standard under Ptolemy II before the silver mint of Jerusalem closed, sometime around 261/260 BC (*CPE* 1.1, 387–388, nos. 705–712).

Although the silver and gold coinage of the region was largely supplied by the Ptolemaic mint of Ake-Ptolemaïs in southern Phoenicia, new mints were also established at Ioppe and Gaza under Ptolemy II (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 658–696). While these operated throughout his reign, under Ptolemy III they seem to have produced coinage specifically to finance his campaigns into Syria and other parts of the Seleucid Empire during the Third Syrian War (246–241 bc) (*CPE* 1.1, 387–388, nos. 705–712). After the end of the conflict the mints fell silent until 225/224 bc, when the death of Seleucus II sparked concern that hostilities between Seleucid and Ptolemy might resume. For the remainder of the Ptolemaic period, the standard practice was to produce coinage at mints in southern Coele Syria only when the kingdom faced new conflicts with the Seleucid Empire. No minting activity occurs in the region under Ptolemy IV, except during the Fourth Syrian War (221–217 bc), when a new mint at Ascalon struck tetradrachms to support the successful defense of Egypt against Antiochus III (*CPE* 1.1, nos. 939–942). It closed again after this conflict, but the cities of Dora, Ioppe, and Strato's Tower opened as Ptolemaic mints to support Ptolemy V in the Fifth Syrian War (202–195 bc) (Carlen and Lorber 2019).

The Seleucid Period

The victory of Antiochus III in the Fifth Syrian War won Phoenicia and southern Coele Syria for the Seleucid Empire, but, as we have seen, no action was ever taken to connect these regions to the open currency zone of the Seleucids. Instead, they remained a closed currency zone where Ptolemaic tetradrachms continued to circulate. During the Fifth Syrian War, mobile military mints had provided Seleucid bronze coins to support Antiochus III's army in the field as it continued its inexorable march south, but once the conquest was complete, the king and his immediate successors made little impact on coin production in the region. What Attic-weight

silver and bronze coinage was needed to support Seleucid garrisons and administrators in southern Coele Syria was largely provided by Ake-Ptolemaïs.

This situation changed marginally under Antiochus IV, when a series of denominated bronze coins imitating royal types from Seleucia on the Tigris were probably minted by the military colony at Samaria, and a quasi-municipal bronze coinage was struck at Ascalon, paralleling developments in Phoenicia and Syria (*SC* 2.1, 94–96, nos. 1489–1490 and nos. 1494–1496). No mints operated in southern Coele Syria under Demetrius I, but under Alexander I, Ascalon, Gaza, and possibly Marisa struck bronze quasi-municipal coinages (*SC* 2.1, nos. 1847–1853). During the first reign of Demetrius II (146–139 bc), which was troubled first by the rival king, Antiochus VI (144–142 bc), and then by Tryphon (142–138 bc), Coele Syria was politically divided, like Syria and Phoenicia. Gaza continued to produce its quasi-municipal coinage and struck an emission of Phoenician-weight Seleucid tetradrachms in 140/139 bc (Hoover 2020) while Ascalon and Marisa struck for Antiochus VI and Tryphon (*SC* 2.1, nos. 2026–2028 and 2047–2048). The Gazan tetradrachm of Demetrius II and the Ascalonite silver issues of his opponents illustrate the continued tendency to open silver mints in Coele Syria primarily when military action in the region required it—a policy going back to the Ptolemaic period. Subsequent silver production at Ascalon also appears to be linked to conflicts between rival Seleucid kings in the region.

The royal Seleucid bronze coinage produced at Jerusalem following the capitulation of the city and the Hasmonean high priest, John Hyrcanus I, to Antiochus VII is remarkable for its types, a lily on the obverse and an anchor on the reverse with a legend naming the king (*SC* 2.1, no. 2123) (fig. 6.15). These seem to reflect the same growing civic influence on Seleucid coinage that has already been noted in Syria and Phoenicia in the second century bc, but to a higher degree. The Jerusalem series not only features a civic emblem (the lily), but is also careful to avoid a royal portrait that might be offensive to Jewish religious sensibilities, instead representing the king and the Seleucid Empire by the anchor badge of the dynasty. In addition, the civic emblem has been given pride of place on the obverse while the Seleucid anchor appears on the reverse (Hoover 2003). An associated denomination featured a helmet and an aphlaston (Ariel 2019). Although this was destined to be the first and last coinage of Jerusalem struck under Seleucid authority, it had a great deal of impact on the subsequent autonomous bronze coinages of the high priests that began after the death of Antiochus VII in 129 bc. Lilies, anchors, and helmets frequently appear on coins of John Hyrcanus I and Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 bc) (Meshorer 2001, 34–35 and 37). The influence of the Seleucid anchor may be detected even later, on the Jerusalem coinage of Herod the Great (37–34 bc).

FIGURE 6.15. Bronze coin of Antiochus VII, Jerusalem (132/131 **BC**). ANS 2013.63.1.

Autonomy and the Coming of Rome

Just as the destructive conflict between Antiochus VIII and Antiochus IX in 116–96 BC led to grants or seizures of autonomous status by cities in Syria and Phoenicia, cities of Coele Syria like Gaza and Ascalon also claimed their autonomy in this period and advertised it on their coins. Gaza struck bronze issues with civic types that, following the pattern already noted for Phoenicia, describe the city as "holy and inviolable" (Kushnir-Stein 2000, nos. 1–3). Ascalon followed developments in Phoenicia even more closely by continuing to strike traditional Phoenician-weight tetradrachms but replacing the royal legend with one naming the city as

"holy, inviolable, and autonomous." Unlike Tyre and Sidon, Ascalon did not feature the head of a civic deity on the obverse, but instead depicted an ambiguous royal portrait that may have been intended to represent Antiochus VIII (Spaer 1984) (fig. 6.15).

Ascalon continued to strike its silver coinage with some regularity down to 54/53 bc (fig. 6.16).

FIGURE 6.16. Silver tetradrachm of Ascalon (63/62 **BC**). ANS 1977.158.837.

Phoenician-weight tetradrachms were again struck in 50/49 or 39/38 bc, but with the portrait of Cleopatra VII on the obverse, before all silver production ceased at the city.

The real flowering of autonomous civic coinage in the region belongs to the period after the creation of the Roman province of Syria in 64/63 bc, when cities like Gaba, Gadara, Marisa, and Nysa-Scythopolis—most of which had never struck coinage before—also began to produce their own bronze coinages bearing dates usually described as being based on a "Pompeian" Era, but really representing local eras of autonomy (Barkay 2003, nos. 1–6; Gitler and Kushnir-Stein 2004; *RPC* I, no. 378; Spijkerman 1978, nos. 3–7).

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CHAPTER 7

ROMAN ART IN THE NEAR EAST

OLYMPIA BOBOU AND RUBINA RAJA

Introduction

In order to discuss Roman art in Syria, one first needs to address the question of what Roman art is and how that is defined – especially in the regions that were outside Italy, so outside the core of the Roman empire. In this chapter, we present four axes that are essential for the study and understanding of Roman art beyond the boundaries of Rome and Italy in general, and the area of the Near East and Syria in particular.

Roman Art outside Rome: Transmissions, Interpretations, Adaptations, and Resources

Roman art outside of Rome is a topic that is extremely broad yet still ill defined (Borg 2015; Hallett 2015). What we define as Roman art differs from perspective to perspective, from where we view the material—center or periphery and depending on contexts, framing and even reframing of the material. Where Roman art might have been easier to define a century and even some decades ago (see Brendel 1953; Wheeler 1964; Toynbee 1965; Strong 1976, esp. 173), recent developments in the field of art history and classical archaeology push us to rethink what Roman art is—at least outside of Rome itself (for example, see Borg 2015; Lichtenberger and Raja 2017; Haug, Hielscher, and Lauritsen 2021). It is not just a push for more inclusiveness and acknowledgment of the places outside of Rome, which in fact made up most of what we define as the Roman world, but also for understanding how art forms developed and were transmitted, interpreted, and adapted, as well as understanding how local and imperial (imported) resources and access to these would have impacted the way art came to look as well. There is still a lot of exciting work to be done on Roman art, and this chapter does not encompass all of the aspects that could be explored, but it takes a case study approach to the topic and includes examples of art imported from Rome or other places in the Roman Empire to Syria and the Near East as well as examples of locally produced art from the first three centuries AD from the region in question. Four main axes are pivotal for the approach we take here, which we argue might bring a new and differently structured view on how to approach and understand Roman art in Syria and the Near East. These are transmissions of Roman art; interpretations of Roman art, including motifs; adaptations of Roman art in local art; and resources, both in terms of materials available and the craftsman traditions in place in the region. These four considerations are decisive for the ways in which art developed in the first three centuries AD (for Roman art in the provinces, see Woolf 1994; Stewart 2010; Smith 2015; Wilson 2015; Alcock, Egri, and Frakes 2016; see also Rienjang and Stewart 2020, esp. Stoye 2020; Stewart 2020; Tanabe 2020).

Roman art was part of a cultural way of expressing values and ideals, of commemorating individuals and groups—real of mythological—and creating a space to speak about the world. It was also mass produced, with "masterpieces" replicated across the Empire in different media

instead of being unique, celebrated *objets d'art* (Hallett 2015). One need only think of the numerous statues of *Doryphoros*, and then consider also the implications that this replication had for the appreciation of artists and art (Squire 2015). While some monuments or even building complexes (like fora), and artifacts (like cameos) were intrinsically linked to civic and imperial power (Hölscher 2015; Holliday 2015), others expressed the aspirations, wishes, and ambitions of freed individuals and slaves, who were at the lowest tiers of the Roman social pyramid, despite their wealth, in the case of freedpersons (Hackworth Petersen 2015). As the case of art in Roman Syria will show, it is not possible to discuss Roman art as a single, unified art; rather, one must examine trends that originate in different regions and express wishes and carry messages and meanings that range from the deeply personal and regional (as in the case of votives and funerary portraits) to those that could be immediately understood in any geographical point of the Empire and linked the province to the center (like imperial portraiture).

Impacts and Changes: Roman Art in Syria and the Near East after the Roman Civil Wars

The end of the third Mithradatic war (63 BC) brought to a close the Seleucid Empire, by then greatly reduced in size, with Pompey making it a Roman province (see Seager 2002, 57–59; see also, Mayor 2009, 312–354; Madsen 2014, 127–128). During the reign of Septimius Severus, the province was divided into Syria Coele, with Antioch as its capital, and Syria Phoenice, with its capital Tyre (Birley 1999, 114; Butcher 2003, 84–85). During the brief period of the Palmyrene Empire under Zenobia, both provinces were incorporated into it (see Millar 1993, 167–173; Hartmann 2001; Sartre 2001, 979–982; Butcher 2003, 59–60; Southern 2008, 101–130; Andrade 2017, 165–190; for Zenobia, see also Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2014). This lasted until 273, when Aurelian sacked Palmyra with his army and defeated the Palmyrenes, bringing Syria back under Roman rule (Hartmann 2001, 352–426; Sartre 2001, 982–984; Southern 2008, 131–148; Andrade 2017, 191–212). The provinces were restructured under Diocletian, becoming part of the Diocese of the East until the middle of the fourth century, when the Diocese was split into several provinces, with Syria divided between Syria Prima, Syria Salutaris, Phoenice, Phoenice Lebanensis, and Euphratensis (Millar 1993, 211–212; Butcher 2003, 85–87).

The best-studied artistic outputs of Syria are the sculptures and the mosaics. The evidence from them points to two different artistic traditions: one was influenced by Hellenistic culture, the other followed local practices and habits. While "Greek"-style marble objects were as popular in the Roman period as in the Hellenistic in the coastal sites (see also Lichtenberger, chapter 5, this volume), with the peace and the opportunities for trade that were a consequence of integration into the Roman Empire, inland cities became wealthy enough to start importing marble sculptures in greater numbers than before (Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023, xiv–xv). At the same time, inland cities continued producing high numbers of statues in local stone and in the local styles. The same two trends can be seen in the mosaics of the region: "Greek" iconographic themes, such as images from mythology, are common, but motifs and scenes with local meanings are also present, especially in public buildings.

Materials and Workshops

Marble was not a local type of stone and had to be imported to the region (Fischer 1998). The recent publication of the marble sculpture of Syria in a corpus edited by Mustafa Koçak and

Detlev Kreikenbom (Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023), and the study of the Roman statues in the Museum of Damascus (Weber 2006) present a solid overview of the region's marble statuary (for exceptions, see Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023, xii; see also Skupinska-Løvset 1999 and de Jong 2017: these are the only other attempts to pull together the portraits in different media in the first case, and the funerary objects in the other). Their research shows that marble came primarily from modern Greece (Paros, Penteli, Thassos) and Türkiye (Prokonessos, Dokimeion, Aphrodisias) (Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023, xv–xvi). The evidence testifies to the productivity of the quarries and the high value placed on these particular marbles. It also shows how Syria was embedded in the trade routes of the Eastern Roman Empire, since, so far, no Italian marble has been identified among the sculptural fragments and statues of the region (see, for example, Balty 2004).

While there is no complete corpus of all the sculpture produced in the region that will allow for proper quantitative analysis of the material, it is still clear that the majority of the statuary from Syria and the Levant was made in the local stones. Northern Syria has deposits of yellow and whitish limestone, while southern Syria is rich in basalt, a volcanic stone, whose color ranges from brown to almost black (Wenning 2001, 312; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019, 138), leading to an immediate distinction between sculptures from the north and the south. After this first, broad categorization, the use of technical and stylistic criteria is necessary for distinguishing the sculpture of the various cities and their environs (for north Syrian sculptures, see recently Blömer 2014; 2019; for southern Syrian, see Sartre-Fauriat 2001; Dentzer-Feydy et al. 2007; see also Lichtenberger and Raja 2020). This brings up the question of the artists, one that is still difficult to answer based on the surviving evidence. There are two main lines of thought: that workshops existed locally or that artists and craftsmen traveled across the region. This was in addition to objects imported fully finished from the marble-producing centers of Greece and Asia Minor. The reality, however, might lie somewhere in between, and circumstances might have differed from place to place.

In Palmyra, for example, a strong tradition of portrait sculpture existed that we can trace across almost three hundred years (Raja, Bobou, and Romanowska 2021; Steding 2022). From the limestone and technical characteristics, it is clear that this sculpture was produced locally. This included also the production of sarcophagi, made in the local limestone, of which more than seven hundred have survived in different states of preservation (Bobou and Raja 2023a). Within the sarcophagi corpus of Palmyra, however, there are four fragments of Attic sarcophagi (fig. 7.1) (Michałowski 1962, 141–143, cat. nos. 14–15; Michałowski 1963, 154, cat. no. 48; Wielgosz 2010, 84–85; Bobou and Raja 2023a, 969–971). The largest of these fragments is 68 cm (Michałowski 1962, 141–142, cat. no. 14), meaning that the whole sarcophagus box would have been over a meter in height and over two meters in length.

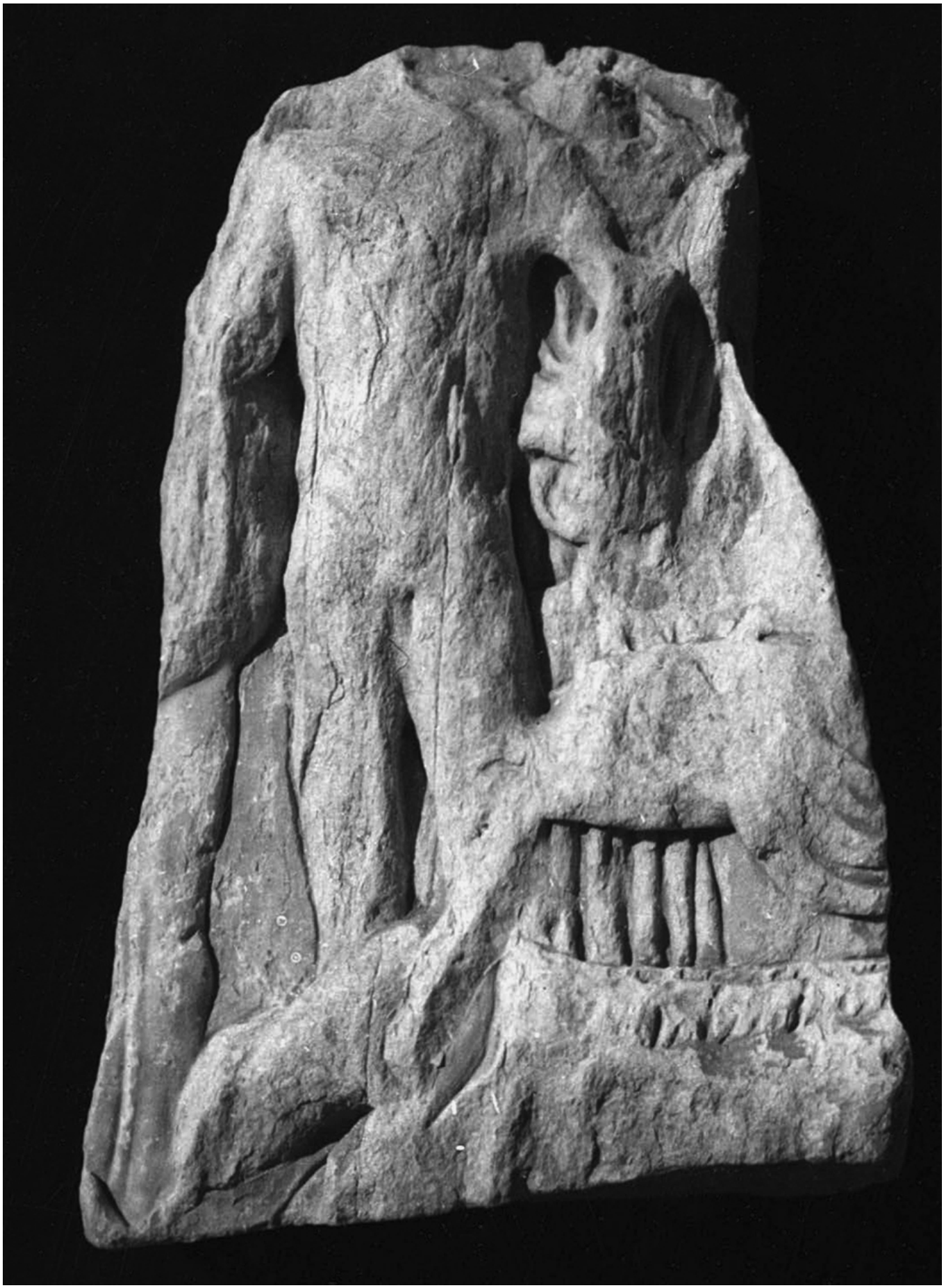

FIGURE 7.1. Fragment of Attic sarcophagus from Palmyra. Palmyra Museum, Palmyra, inv. no. CD 79. Image © H. Romanowski/courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw.

The size, material (described as Pentelic marble: Wielgosz 2010, 84–85), and quality of the craftsmanship make clear that these were not carved in Palmyra, either fully or just in their final stages, but that the objects would have traveled in their final form from their original location. This raises several questions: Had the customer ordered a specific sarcophagus? Did these sarcophagi come in bunches? Could the customer choose or did the buyer simply have to take what came? However, what seems likely is that a workshop that specialized in producing or finishing up marble sculpture did not exist in Palmyra at any point in time, but that certain groups in the city had the means to have lavish grave monuments imported to underline their wealth and civic importance. Wielgosz-Rondolino (2023, 520) has observed, however, that while the earliest imports were in the costlier Pentelic and Dokimeion marble, the later ones were made of the cheaper Prokonnesian marble. Statues of Thasian marble have also been found in Palmyra (Wielgosz-Rondolino 2023, 522).

In the Decapolis city of Gerasa in northern Jordan, the situation might have been different. There, numerous fragmented marble statues have been found in various parts of the city (see catalogue and references to the sculptures in Weber-Karyotakis 2023c). Several of these seem to have been made in the main artistic centers, with a group of statues of Muses and other figures made of Pentelic marble and associated with the workshop of Antoneinos of Alexandria (see al-Bashaireh et al. 2020; al-Bashaireh and Weber-Karyotakis 2021). Others, however, carry the imprint of local work, such as the torso of the Artemis Rospigliosi (fig 7.2) (Lichtenberger and Raja 2015, 493; see also Weber-Karyotakis 2023c, 422–423).

FIGURE 7.2. Torso of Artemis Rospigliosi. Jerash, Department of Antiquities of Jordan, exc. No. J13-Da-10-2x. Image © Danish-German Jerash Northwest Quarter Project.

Judging from the style and craftsmanship, they were not produced outside the Near East and therefore the marble for them must have been imported and then worked locally.

Bronze also needed to be imported and was used for votive, honorific, and decorative statuary, making the commission and setting up of such a statue yet another costly and conspicuous display choice. The contexts of the statues depended on the subject matter: images of gods were set up inside temples or sanctuaries, honorific statues within public spaces such as the agora or on columns lining the major thoroughfares of cities, while statuettes were used in houses as decoration or within small, household shrines.

The artistic production of the region can be grouped together in different ways: based on geography, material, function, and iconography. In this chapter, the first division chosen is between divine figures and portraits, since these broader categories are better suited for this survey chapter (for a regional approach, see Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023.). These served as votive dedications, honorific, or even decorative objects.

Statues of divine figures

Most of the marble statues recorded belong to figures from myths, with those of Dionysos, Aphrodite, and their entourage (Satyrs, Silenos, maenads, nymphs, Eros) appearing most frequently. The contexts of large-scale figures, when known, are similar to the places where statues of these divine figures were found across the empire: theaters, public baths, houses. These particular contexts invite the interpretation of their function as "decorative" (Koçak and K reikenbom 2023, xv). At the same time, one must not forget that these statues also occupied a traditional, symbolic space. Dionysos was the god of the theater, and members of his entourage had a starring role in satyr-plays, a genre still performed until the second century AD (Shaw 2014, 146). Therefore, sculpted images of Dionysos and his entourage in the theater were highly appropriate, symbolically charged, traditional images that were directly relevant to the performances. Theaters were also appropriate spaces for setting up statues of the patron deities of a city—for example, the Athena found in the theater of Philadelphia, modern Amman (Lichtenberger 2023, 458, cat. no. Phila-3).

In houses, divine and other such figures served as starting points of discussion, offered the chance to display one's erudition, and, in the case of statues made after famous prototypes, showed also the host's culture and wealth (good survey in Muth 2015). Such was the case with the various statues from houses in Zeugma (Koçak 2023, 566): one statuette copied the Aphrodite type Louvre-Naples (Koçak 2023, 566–567, cat. no. Zeug-1), and another the Knidian (Koçak 2023, 567–568, cat. no. Zeug-2). Another statuette from Zeugma showed a Satyr that was probably made in Aphrodisias, a city renowned in the Roman period for the quality of its sculptural production (Önal 2013, 47; personal communication with R. R. R. Smith). That statuettes are known from the houses of Zeugma is the result of the systematic excavations at the site, compared to how and when other sites were excavated.

Even in the bath houses, where, one could argue, the sculptures had a decorative function, their presence displayed the patrons' desire for display and for beautification of an essential space for any Roman city. This was especially important for builders of baths in the fourth century, when bath houses functioned as spaces where old statues, especially ones depicting deities and heroes could be reused without offending the sensibilities of the newly Christianized population (see, for example, the discussions in Stirling 2014, 105–107; Smith 2016, 156–158; Deforest 2019, 203; Kristensen 2019).

Very few marble statues can be connected to sanctuaries. This is more a matter of archaeological bias and survival rather than of different ritual/votive practices in the cities of Syria and the Near East. In fact, several of the statues from sanctuaries come from Palmyra, a city otherwise poor in marble statuary: a small-scale statue of Aphrodite from the temple of Nabu; the lower part of a statue of Aphrodite from the temple of Bel; the fragment of a small-scale statue depicting Aphrodite, a small head possibly also depicting Aphrodite, both from the sanctuary of Baalshamin; a head of an Athena statue and the famous Athena/Allat, from the sanctuary of Allat (Wielgosz-Rondolino 2023, 524–531, cat. nos. Palmy-3, Palmy-4, Palmy-6, Palmy-7, Palmy-11, Palmy-12); and the head of Nike from the area of the Efqa spring (Wielgosz -Rondolino 2023, 535, cat. no. Palmy-18). The size of the statues and fragments indicates that they had a votive function; however, the statue of Athena/Allat, had a second life in the late third century. After first serving as a votive or as an embellishment of a public space, it became a cult statue in the restored sanctuary of Allat, when it was incorporated in the newly built Camp of Diocletian (Gawlikowski 2017, 162–163; 2021, 142).

Far more numerous than the marble statues depicting Greek and Roman deities, according to established—and imported—iconographies, are the reliefs and statues depicting local divine

figures made in local limestone or basalt. Some of these were amalgamated with Greek/Roman deities and their worship was spread with greater or lesser success outside their local communities, for example, Zeus Heliopolitanus or Zeus Dolichenus (see Kropp 2010; Blömer 2012; Hajjar 1977; Blömer, chapter 39, this volume). Others were worshipped without any changes in their iconography or meaning—for example, Aglibol, Malakbel, or Mithras (fig. 7.3).

FIGURE 7.3. Statue of Mithras, from the Saïda Mithraeum. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. AO 22256. Image © 2006 RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Franck Raux. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010120306.

Others do not seem to have traveled far from their place of origin—for example Arsu, whose cult is not found outside northern Syria (and in particular, the cities of Palmyra and Dura-Europos: see mainly Dirven 1999, 88–98; Teixidor 1979, 69–71).

The relief format was used for smaller-scale dedications (votives) that were placed inside shrine enclosures or temples, or incorporated into the walls of sanctuaries and temples. Small-scale altars, usually below 50 cm, also carried relief depictions of deities or worshippers or both. These could be placed within temples, sanctuary enclosures, or open-air shrines (see recently Teixidor 1979, in passim; Mazzilli 2018; Rieger 2020; Kubiak-Schneider 2021).

Finally, small-scale figures of deities made of marble were deposited as grave goods (see, for example, Weber-Karyotakis 2023a, 156–157, cat. no. Bala-2 and Kropp 2023, 267, cat. no. Emes-5). Not many have been documented (see de Jong 2017 for overview of grave goods) and their costly material sets them apart from the terracottas that usually were deposited in the grave in other regions of the Roman world. Their subject matter, however—in these two cases, the goddess Aphrodite—makes them similar to terracottas of divine figures like Eros or Psyche (see, for example, the terracottas from Amathous, Stefani 2019, 124).

Portrait Statues

One of the earliest Roman-period bronze statues in the region is known only through a literary reference: it was a quadriga set up in Laodikeia by Octavian after 30 BC (Franken and Weber-Karyotakis 2019, 102). Slightly later are the statues set up in the temple of Bel by the legate Minucius Titus for Drusus, Tiberius, and Germanicus between AD 17 and 19, when Germanicus was in the region (Yon 2012, cat. no. 3; see also Franken and Weber-Karyotakis 2019, 106). Several bronze statues and statuary groups can be connected to Hadrian's visits to towns in the provinces of Syria and Arabia, including Palmyra and Gerasa. In Palmyra, the habit of setting up bronze statues to ruling figures was also adopted by those wanting to honor Odainat and, later, Zenobia and their son Waballat (Yon 2012, 63–78). Bronze was also used for the depiction of local notables (see Franken and Weber-Karyotakis 2019, 92–96).

Portraits in marble were not as numerous as those of divine figures (Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023, xv); a reason for this must be the use of metal, primarily bronze, for the depiction of honored citizens, military leaders, and members of the imperial family. As with idealized sculpture, their context is often unknown: when it is, they were either votives placed in sanctuaries (for example, a male figure in the Greek-style costume of chiton and himation found in the sanctuary of Baalshamin and one "evocatus" in the sanctuary of Nabu [Wielgosz-Rondolino 2023, 553, cat. no. Palmy-34, 548, Palmy-30]), or honorific statues set up in public spaces. Statues of emperors, members of the imperial family, and local notables were often placed in theaters (see, for example, the portraits of Faustina Minor and Hadrian from Philadelphia, modern Amman: Lichtenberger 2023, 462–463, cat. nos. Phila-9 and Phila-10), or the agora (see, for example, Wielgosz-Rondolino 2023, 539–541, 548, cat. nos. Palmy-23, Palmy-24, and Palmy-27), or the bouleuterion/senate (see Wielgosz-Rondolino 2023, 542–544 and 545–552, cat. nos. Palmy-26, Palmy-28, Palmy-29, Palmy-31, Palmy-32). Statues of emperors may also belong to the category of cult statues. Such is the case with the torso of a colossal cuirassed statue from Doliche (Blömer 2023, 573, cat. no. Doli-5); it may have been an honorific statue representing an emperor, dedicated by the city or prominent citizens, but it may have also been a cult statue, with the emperor the divine figure receiving worship. Special note must be made here of a portrait of Antinoos of exceptional quality from Balaneai, modern Baniyas (Weber-Karyotakis 2023a, 160–162, cat. no. Bala-5; Smith et al. 2018, 70–75, cat. no. 1); the inscription characterizes the bust as a dedication set up by a Roman citizen and identifies Antinoos as a "hero." This dedication by a private citizen offers some insight into the world of private religious practices and how they intersected with the public display of votives (Smith et al. 2018, esp. 17–27). Portrait statues from houses are not known from the region so far.

Most of these marble statues have survived in fragmentary form; it is possible, however, to make a few observations regarding the figures. Cuirass statues were used for the depiction of either gods or emperors (see, for example, Koçak 2023, 114, cat. no. Seleu-14; 187; Kropp 202

3, cat. no. Mara-3; Wielgosz-Rondolino and Weber-Karyotakis 2023, 300–301, cat. no. Phili-2). The Greek-style chiton and himation were the usual costume for the local male notables; it had connotations of belonging to the cultured elite of the East and indicated that the represented figure was a good citizen (Smith 1998; 2015, 481–486). The toga, with its immediate association with Roman citizenship, was rarer: the few statues of togati before 212 can be associated with the limited number of local elites who were awarded this honor. The toga, however, did not become more popular as a costume choice after the edict of Caracalla and may have been used only by those who had not yet begun their public careers (Smith 2015, 484). With the survival of mostly torsos, often out of context and without any accompanying inscriptions with bases, this suggestion cannot be verified for the area of Syria and the Near East. Women of the elite also preferred to be depicted in the Greek-style chiton himation instead of the stola. No marble statue is known from Syria showing a woman in that Roman garment; the types of the Large and Small Herculaneum Woman, however, were often used for the depiction of elite women and female members of the imperial family (fig. 7.4).

FIGURE 7.4. Marble female statue in the type of the Large Herculaneum Woman, from Palmyra. National Museum of Damascus, Damascus, inv. no. C4021. Image © Palmyra Portrait Project and Rubina Raja, courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

The types carried connotations of dignity and participation in civic culture and were replicated often across the Empire for portraits of wealthy women (Trimble 2011; Kampen 2015, 85).

In terms of function and context, the locally produced statues of the good citizens—less frequently of their wives and daughters, and of the benefactors of cities, including the imperial family—did not differ from those made of marble (see, for example, the imperial group at Gerasa: Weber-Karyotakis 2023c, 415–416). There are, however, some differences in iconography and typology. When local materials are used, the Greek-style chiton is sometimes replaced by a local tunic. This is the case in Palmyra, for example, where a short-sleeved tunic is clearly visible under the himation. Women, when depicted, are shown dressed in their local choice of costume (see Krag 2018, 27–66, for female costume choices). Seated statues of local notables and intellectuals are also a popular choice in the broader region (Weber 2006, 97–100; Hübner and Weber-Karyotakis 2023, 475). One bigger difference is in the number of statues of elite men compared to those of elite women; women were not as often represented as in cities of Asia Minor, Greece, or Italy.

Portraits in the funerary sphere were perhaps the ones most used for expressing a person's or a family's individual choices, in combination with costume choices that were distinctive of their community. Two Hadrianic, marble portraits from the same tomb in Marathos, modern Amrit, show the deceased in portrait busts and represent the particular display choices of one specific family (Mustafa and Chávet Lozoya 2016; Annan 2019, 183–185; Kropp 2023, 187–189, cat. nos. Mara-4 and Mara-5).

Most of the funerary portraits were made in the various local stones, and their iconographical details differed markedly depending on where they were produced (for the funerary sculpture of the region, see Blömer and Raja 2019). For example, the depiction of female headdresses is one such detail that varies depending on the region (Rumscheid 2019). Soldiers were depicted mostly in civilian costume with the addition of a sword and/or sword belt in Palmyra (Bobou and Raja 2023b), but with a cuirass in reliefs from southern Syria (Weber-Karyotakis 2023d, 493). Another common feature in the wider region is the use of seated limestone statues in the funerary sphere (Yaman 2020, 346–347; Weber-Karyotakis 2023b, 124). One rare statue from the east necropolis of Zeugma, shows the woman in the guise of Pudicitia (Yaman 2020, 346).

In addition to the depictions on reliefs, sarcophagi were also used as a vehicle for the portrayal of the deceased. A few marble sarcophagi found in coastal south Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon depict the deceased—or members of their family—in bust form over garlands (Annan 2019, 186). This form of depiction is also found in Palmyra, where it is used on sarcophagi made of the local limestone in tombs from the southeast necropolis of the city, and where almost all of the examples were gathered by Captain Duvaux in one tomb (Bobou and Raja 2023a, 115–116, 135, 441–460, cat. nos. 180–190). Palmyra has also yielded a large number of limestone sarcophagi with distinctive iconography with the family on the lid and usually busts of other family members on the box; caravan scenes or scenes or sacrifice scenes are rare (Bobou and Raja 2023a, 135–137).

Mosaics

Mosaics in the Roman period were one of the most popular forms of decoration for elite houses; they were also used in public spaces (Dunbabin 1999, 1–3). The mosaics known are all polychrome and can be divided into two broad categories: those with geometric decorations, or those with panels with figural decoration surrounded by frames with geometrical or floral motifs (for the mosaics from the region, see Dunbabin 1999, 160–186). They show how local workshops used motifs and scenes that circulated across the Roman Empire, but also how mosaicists moved from city to city (see Wootton 2016; Boschetti et. al 2020). In Edessa, in

particular, the workshops of the city seem to have had a varied repertory, ranging from decorative mosaics with mythological scenes to funerary mosaics with portraits (Abdallah, Desreumaux, and al-Kaid 2020).

In the mosaics from houses, the panels are often decorated with scenes from Greek epic poetry or plays. Best known are the mosaics from the houses of Antioch and Zeugma; these share common features and might have been produced by the same workshops (for the mosaics from Antioch, see Kondoleon 2000, 63–78; Becker and Kondoleon 2005; for the mosaics from Zeugma, see Önal 2009; Dunbabin 2013; Görkay 2017; 2020, 160–259). Other main sites that have revealed mosaics in domestic contexts are Apameia, Shabba/Philippopolis, and Palmyra (for these, see Balty 1989; 1995; especially for the mosaics of the houses of Palmyra see Stern 1977; Balty 2014).

A mosaic from a basilica in Palmyra contains the unusual image of a hunter hunting a tiger; this is juxtaposed with a mosaic with the more traditional scene of Bellerophon killing the Chimaera. The scenes may refer to Odainat's victories over the Sasanians (Gawlikowski 2004; Gawlikowski and Żuchowska 2010; Gawlikowski 2021, 69–70).

In the cities of the Roman-period Levant and the Near East, one also finds panel mosaics with figural decoration used in funerary contexts, although they were limited to only a few cities, such as Sidon (Annan 2019, 173–175), Emesa (Annan 2019, 175), and the more famous Edessa (Segal 1953; 1959a; 1959b; 1970; Drijvers and Healey 1999; Salman 2008; Healey 2009, Rumscheid 2013; Önal 2017). Usually the panels contain images of the deceased; images with an eschatological character or comforting divine figures appear more rarely: this is the case with the Phoenix and Orpheus mosaics from Edessa (fig. 7.5) (Drijvers 1973; Healey 2006; Possekel 2008; Salman 2008).

FIGURE 7.5. Orpheus mosaic from Edessa. Image © John Healey.

Wall Paintings

Wall paintings were also popular for conveying meanings and messages; however, they survive even more rarely than mosaics. They were used in houses, public spaces, and funerary contexts, and the material that has survived ranges from simple decorative motifs to elaborate scenes (unlike the mosaics of the region, the paintings have never been studied together: see Butcher 2003, 325; Blömer 2019, 54–55; Raja 2019, 101; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019, 145–146). The systematic excavations of Dura-Europos have revealed some of the most important wall paintings from Roman-period Syria in terms of preservation and iconography. They come from several of the city's sacred spaces, including the temple of Bel, the Mithraeum, the Synagogue, and the Christian house-church, thus revealing what was important to these

distinct, and often competing, religious communities. The houses of Dura-Europos also had paintings with figural scenes (for the Dura-Europos paintings, see in particular Perkins 1973; Rajak 2011; Peppard 2011; Deleeuw 2011; Kaizer 2019; Moormann 2021).

Very few paintings have survived from the houses of Palmyra: they show the taste for bold colors and geometric decoration that was popular in the second and third centuries ad (Tober 2013). The tombs of Palmyra, however, have preserved numerous paintings on their walls: the costliest monuments of them, the tower tombs, contained the simplest painted decoration, while portraits, banquet scenes, and scenes from Greek mythology with possible eschatological meanings were found in the hypogea (Ingholt 1930; 1932; Sørensen 2016). In the tomb of the Three Brothers, in particular, the exedra facing the entrance was entirely painted, with Achilles in Skyros shown on the lunette and the rape of Ganymede on the ceiling (Eristov and Vibert-Guigue 2019a and 2019b).

Only a few Roman-period wall paintings have survived from the area of modern-day Jordan: the earliest of them is the façade of a rock-cut tomb from Petra that preserves traces of color (Vibert-Guigue 2011, 331). The other remains from the region show first the influence of Hellenistic-style wall paintings ("Masonry Style") that was replaced by paintings with human and animal figures in the middle of the first century bc (Vibert-Guigue 2011, 337). Even though it is possible to trace a similar development from "Masonry" Style to figural paintings in the cities of the Decapolis, their style is distinct, indicating that different workshops operated in the two regions (Vibert-Guigue 2011; Thomsen 2022, 201–202). Most of the paintings that have survived from this region come either from sacred spaces, such as the temple of Zeus (Vibert-Guigue 2011, 337–338; Thomsen 2022, 202), or the funerary sphere. The rock-cut tombs of Abila, in particular, are characterized by the extensive use of wall paintings in their interior. Most were depictions of floral decorations or animals, but human figures were also painted on the walls. Some probably represented the deceased but the possibility that these may have depicted divine figures cannot be excluded, or that they even depicted the deceased in the guise of deities. The paintings do not seem to have followed any systematic program (for the paintings, see Barbet and Vibert-Guigue 1988–1994; Vibert-Guigue 2011, 338–339; Lichtenberger and Raja 2019, 145–146; for the tombs, see al-Shorman 2022). The Danish-German excavations at the North-West Quarter of Gerasa have revealed that the earlier Roman-period houses were painted in the "Masonry" Style, while a local style taking influences from first-century ad Herodian structures may also have developed (Thomsen 2022, esp. 229–230).

Concluding Remarks

This survey is far from exhaustive, but it shows that while the political center of the empire was in Rome, especially in the period of the early principate, there were several artistic centers in Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor that competed with each other and whose products found their way to Syria and the Near East through trade routes. The evidence so far shows that sculptures were imported from Greece and Asia Minor, and that they could reach as far inland as Palmyra, although in smaller numbers than in the coastal sites. It also shows that there were different economic and personal factors that guided this trade, as the objects imported range from wholly finished statues and sarcophagi to partially carved sarcophagi and blocks of marble whose creation was completed on the site where they arrived (see the Gerasa Artemis mentioned above, for example). In most sites, however, art from the centers was in the minority compared to art that was locally produced. While Greek and Roman iconographic types and motifs were known, patrons seemed to have preferred local iconographies and

characteristics in their art, especially art made for the religious and the funerary sphere; in other cases, they preferred a mixture of the two.

Mosaics and wall paintings have not survived in the same numbers as sculptures, but from those that have been preserved, the picture is more complex. Some regions, such as coastal Syria and Edessa, have forms that are not found elsewhere in this period (i.e., funerary mosaics are known exclusively from there); these coexist with mosaics that follow the figurative traditions and trends of the rest of the empire but were made by local workshops (i.e., mosaics for houses with scenes from epic poetry or the theater). The wall paintings from the tombs of Syria and the Near East also are the products of local workshops that sometimes follow trends known from other sites in the empire (for example, by using figures such as Achilles or Dionysos in the tombs of Palmyra); others have scenes and figures with a local meaning (portraits of people dressed in local costume or busts, in the tombs of Palmyra and Abila).

Thus, the influence of Roman art in Syria and the Near East can be seen through the filter of art that was mainly produced in the Greek artistic centers of the Empire, and even then, it was limited and selective. The patrons of the region chose to import works of art and artists when it suited them and for specific purposes; at the same time, they commissioned works of art from local workshops made in local materials and styles when they needed art to serve a different purpose or strike a different chord with their viewers.

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CHAPTER 8

COINAGE IN ROMAN SYRIA

KRISTINA M. NEUMANN

Numismatic evidence plays a critical role in the analysis of continuity and change for the communities of Greater Syria under Roman rule. As pieces of art, messages of propaganda, and fiscal objects that moved, the gold, silver, and bronze coins minted within the region and the coin assemblages excavated there collectively testify to the diverse and yet interwoven identities, agents, and systems of Roman Syria.

Scholarship has traditionally categorized these artifacts according to dichotomies based on the design or *type* of the coin and the governmental authority guaranteeing its value as money. Coins minted in Syria before 64 BC are grouped into the Hellenistic period and are often examined separately from those produced after Roman annexation. Roman imperial coins—those minted with imperial iconography and bearing the monetary guarantee of the Roman state—are distinguished from Roman provincial coins (previously termed "Greek imperial"). This latter category encompasses its own hazy distinction between more generic coins designated for regional circulation within the Middle East and those issued by municipal governments with city-specific symbols, figures, messages, and *ethnic* or the name of the citizens in the genitive plural (e.g., ANTIOXEΩN, or "of the Antiochians") indicating their collective ownership.

Such divisions prove useful for comparing these coins to others minted across the Roman Empire, but the study of Syria demands a more holistic examination to understand the rich interplay of imagery and authority behind their production. Likewise, studying the images and texts on coins together with their unique distribution expands our insight into how these objects functioned as currency and what were the policies and who were the people governing their circulation. The numismatic evidence can therefore serve as both a qualitative and quantitative dataset against which other textual and archaeological evidence can be compared for reconstructing a fuller history of the ancient Middle East.

Alongside this potential, a few important caveats must be made about the application of numismatics to historical inquiry. Very little is known about the structure, personnel, and operations of ancient mints independent of what the coins themselves offer. Textual sources as well as archaeological context provide intermittent insight into the different life cycles of individual coins, from their production to their use and loss. However, important questions remain unanswered including the process by which new coin types were developed, how many coins were struck at any given time, how coins were introduced into circulation, and how long coins remained in use. We are often left to interpret coin imagery without outside testimony. The conditions governing the recovery and publication of coin finds vary widely as well, making the incredibly disparate assemblages and worn coins difficult to identify.

Challenging as these complexities may be, the coins nevertheless remain one of the most ubiquitous and diverse bodies of evidence for the Roman Middle East. Adding to the extensive catalogues of coin finds excavated at Dura Europos (Bellinger 1949) and Antioch (Waagé 1952) in the early twentieth century are several recently published reports for ancient Syria. This includes important sites like Berytus (Butcher 2001–2002), Zeugma (Butcher 2013), and Palmyra (Krzyżanowska 2014). Comprehensive distribution studies of where, when, and in what quantities certain coins appear in the archaeological record (e.g., Syon 2015; Duyrat 2016) as

well as research into particular iconography (e.g., Butcher 2005; Noreña 2016) newly interrogate the relationship of Levantine numismatic material to its wider historical context. Digital collections like Oxford's *Roman Provincial Coinage* (*RPC*) Online (https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/) make the traditionally printed corpora widely and easily available. The advent of digital technologies and methodologies also affords new opportunities to aggregate, visualize, and analyze larger datasets than ever before, especially as a means of exploring the financial, political, and socio-cultural forces at work within the Middle East (Neumann 2021).

The following survey cannot do justice to the kaleidoscopic coinage of Roman Syria, but it can highlight how the Roman imperial administration evolved in its policies and engagement with civic communities in particular. The boundaries of the province fluctuated throughout Roman rule, but focus will be on the central area of what is today southeastern Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon. Within these limits alone, the numismatic evidence reveals the gradual entanglement of monetary systems and physical coins as the Romans simultaneously preserved, manipulated, experimented, and overhauled the currency of the conquered Middle East.

The Roman Annexation of Syrian Coinage

When the Romans first annexed Syria around 64 BC, they encountered a region fragmented both politically and numismatically. The breakdown of the Seleucid Empire had left many cities to attend to their own needs, which included addressing an absence of royally produced silver and bronze coinage. Scholarship has variously presented these civic issues as either welcomed emblems of local autonomy and pride or practical fiscal necessity (Kushnir-Stein 2001, 41–52; Meadows 2001, 53–63). What is clear is that these coins were the output of the citizens themselves as civic ethnics, new titles, eastern gods, and even dates according to local eras replaced the messaging of the Seleucid state (Seyrig 1950; Hoover 2009).

This practice did not radically change on Roman annexation, as the imperial administration's generally laissez-faire attitude toward local government in the tumultuous first century bc extended to the coinage as well. In the loosely defined province stretching across the Levant, several cities continued to issue their own silver and bronze coins. The traditional silver denomination of a tetradrachm (a large coin weighing between 13 and 15 grams) and occasionally its lower denominations were sporadically produced at places like Laodicea ad Mare and Aradus, while much more consistent minting occurred at Antioch on the Orontes, Tyre, and Sidon (fig. 8.1; *RPC* I, 585–587). Most of these cities also issued their own civic bronze coinage. Other cities only struck bronze, including the northern Tetrapolis cities of Seleucia Pieria and Apamea, Damascus in the south, and Ptolemais and Berytus along the coast. As with silver, bronze coin production varied widely from place to place.

FIGURE 8.1. Syrian coins of the first century **BC**. (a) Tetradrachm from Tyre with Melqart/eagle and civic ethnic; (b) Tetradrachm from Sidon with Tyche/eagle and civic ethnic; (c) Tetradrachm from Antioch with Philip Philadelphus/Zeus, Nike, and civic monogram. Credit: Gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, M 5702; Babelon 1690; Babelon 1541bis.

Unifying elements emerge in the coins' iconography. The vast majority—whether silver or bronze—feature a clear civic ethnic. Often accompanying the mark of the citizens are honorific titles like *hiera kai asylos* ("sacred and inviolable") and *autonomos*, which had already appeared earlier under the last Seleucid kings (Rigsby 1996, 27–29). Greek is the common language, though Phoenician letters and inscriptions do appear on the coins of Tyre and Sidon. Both Greek and eastern gods are featured, from Zeus, Athena, and Dionysus to Baal, Astarte, and Heracles-Melqart. Symbols from earlier empires also persist, such as the Ptolemaic eagle preserved on the silver from Tyre and Sidon (fig. 8.1; Meadows 2001, 57). The civic protector goddess Tyche is especially common with her mural crown made of city walls (fig. 8.1; Mørkholm 1983, 90).

Despite these similarities, the coins in no way formed a monolithic currency. Rather, the evidence reveals a fractured regional system with little indication of any intentional organization by an overarching governmental body. The silver coins minted at Antioch after Roman annexation down through 13 bc illustrate this point well (Neumann 2021, 116–120). Instead of a civic ethnic or Antiochene iconography, the tetradrachms revive the portrait of the long-dead Seleucid king Philip Philadelphus (r. 94–83 or 70s? bc) for the obverse and the standard Seleucid reverse of an enthroned Zeus holding Nike surrounded by the king's name and epithet (fig. 8.1; McAlee 2007, 67–71). This is an interesting choice, as the mint had recently issued silver tetradrachms for the Armenian king Tigranes II with a depiction of Antioch's famous statue by the Greek sculptor Eutychides: a turreted Tyche seated on a mountain with the Orontes River personified at her feet (see fig. 8.2; Foss 1986). Likewise, civic bronzes

contemporary to the tetradrachms regularly identify Antioch with a civic ethnic along with other celebratory titles of *hiera*, *asylos*, *autonomos*, and—most exceptionally for Syria at this time—*metropolis*.

Scholarship has argued that the use of a posthumous Seleucid portrait was a Roman administrative decision either to capitalize on the monetary guarantee of the last "legitimate" king or to match the large quantities of Philip Philadelphus silver still in circulation (*RPC* I, 606). The argument is partially based on larger assumptions about the immediate role of Antioch as provincial capital for the Romans and an unsubstantiated claim that all regional silver production needed imperial approval (see Neumann 2021, 119). More convincing are specialized monograms on certain tetradrachms, which indicate the involvement of at least three governors of Syria: Aulus Gabinius (r. 57–55 bc), the triumvir Crassus (r. 55–53 bc), and the assassin Cassius (r. 53–51 bc) (McAlee 2007, 67). It is unclear if these marks reflect Roman funding or oversight of the mint, but care must be taken to not overstate the role of the Roman government. Other monograms regularly appear on these tetradrachms that are reasonably reconstructed as an abbreviation for the Antiochians themselves (fig. 8.1; Hoover 2004, 31–35; McAlee 61, 67–71). The Antiochians could have been just as responsible as the Roman administration for preserving an established type at their city's mint.

The evidence also reveals little manipulation by the Roman administration in how these coins circulated within Syria. The breakdown of the Hellenistic empires had removed any enforcement of a particular weight standard to which the silver coins were struck. Unique civic standards were employed at mints like Aradus, whereas the Antioch tetradrachms continued to be struck on the ever-debased Attic standard of the Seleucids. Tyrian silver "shekels" were minted on a finer and purer Phoenician standard continued by the Ptolemies and maintained by the Seleucids upon conquest (Butcher and Ponting 2014, 540–552). Frédérique Duyrat's study of the hoard evidence for the first century bc found little mixing of these different coins, which suggests they circulated in increasingly closed "currency zones" within Syria (Duyrat 2016, 388–403). Furthermore, foreign silver from outside of Syria—including the denarii of the Roman conquerors—are also uncommon within the region's hoards dated to this period (Neumann 2021, 133–134).

This fragmentation of the currency extended to the fiduciary bronze coins issued by individual cities. Seleucid royal bronzes had been freely exchanged throughout the region (see Neumann 2021, 78–93, 125–144), but site finds of civic coins dated to the first century bc appear far more localized. Kevin Butcher (2002, 145–152) argued that civic magistrates could regulate which coins served as legal tender, whether this meant preferring those from their own mint or selecting which of the neighboring cities' currency could circulate. The possible reasons for this practice include denominational differences, lack of trust in another city's monetary guarantee, or even an effort to preserve a local currency and economy (Butcher 2004, 144–146). No attempt was made by the Roman administration to integrate either civic bronze or silver into a single currency system.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Romans is still reflected in the coin evidence. Besides the aforementioned monograms of the governors, the civic coins of Syria testify to many cities restarting their local calendars following the activities of Pompey, Caesar, and Antony (Seyrig 1950; *RPC* I, 582–583). Literary and epigraphic sources suggest that the titles appearing on civic coins reflect their confirmation by the Roman administration, such as Caesar affirming Antioch as *metropolis*, *hiera kai asylos*, and *autonomos* (Malalas 9.216) or Laodicea at Mare transforming into "Julia-Laodicea" after Caesar "refounded" it (Rigsby 1996, 501).

The various campaigns of the Romans within the region—against both foreign and internal threats—as well as new taxation policies may also have affected local minting and coin circulation (Butcher 2004, 26–28). A study by François de Callataÿ (2002, 71–89) on civic silver

minted in Syria ties intense periods of coin production to Pompey's activities. Anomalous deposits of civic coins far beyond their normal circulation patterns may indicate Roman military activity as well. For example, an unusual collection of Antiochene civic coins found far away at Samaria-Sebaste in the southern Levant is arguably the result of troop movement from northern Syria (Neumann 2021, 136–139).

The most explicit intervention of Roman administration for this period comes from Mark Antony. His portrait—featured alone as well as with Fulvia (e.g., Tripolis, *RPC* I.4509) or later, Cleopatra (e.g., Ptolemais, *RPC* I.4741; Dora, *RPC* I.4752) —was the very first Roman magistrate to appear on any civic coins minted within Syria (Butcher 2004, 27). It remains debated whether this decision was an imperial or civic initiative. At the very least, these issues extended from the larger dynastic program of Mark Antony over the eastern empire, first as triumvir and later as partner of the Egyptian queen (see Meadows 2019; Carbone 2020). In fact, concurrent with the civic issues was a unique series of bronze coins with the portraits of Mark Antony, Octavian, and Octavia, Latin legends, Roman denominations, and the full name of the prefect Lucius Bibulus. Part of the so-called fleet issues of Mark Antony, these coins have been tentatively attributed to a Syrian mint in what Michel Amandry (1986) deemed a failed attempt to "Romanize" the East (see Burnett 2011, 8–9).

FIGURE 8.2. Syrian coins minted at Antioch under the Julio-Claudians. (a) Tetradrachm with Augustus/Tyche of Antioch and civic monogram; (b) Provincial SC bronze of Augustus; (c) Tetradrachm with Nero/eagle. Credit: (a) and (c): Gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Chandon de Briailles 1828; R2780. (b) Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Münzkabinett/Dirk Sonnenwald, Public Domain Mark 1.0.

The operations of Mark Antony foreshadowed the adoption of a new policy toward Syrian currency under the Julio-Claudians. Importantly, local civic minting did not end at this point, though the iconography of these coins reveals city mints more actively engaging with the Roman administration. The imperial portrait slowly became a regular feature on the obverse of civic coins (*RPC* I, 38–40; Nurpetlian 2017) with accompanying legends in both Greek and—in the case of the newly established Roman *colonia* of Berytus—Latin (e.g., *RPC* I.4540). A unique series of bronze coins minted at Antioch around 5 BC goes beyond simply naming the emperor to proclaim that "the Antiochians [bestow] the role/title of *archiereus* to the holy high priest Caesar [Augustus]" (Noreña 2016, 298).

Some scholars have understood the use of the emperor's image as indication of growing imperial control over these mints (e.g., Grant 1946, 396–398; Bruun 1999), but the sporadic adoption across the region better indicates civic initiative as cities reoriented toward their new ruler (Heuchert 2005, 44). They also maintained traditional designs with important gods and symbols sometimes replacing the emperor's portrait; a coin of Aradus actually prioritizes the head of Tyche over a much smaller bust of Augustus (*RPC* I.4483; Burnett 2011, 7). Though these coins are often deemed "pseudo-autonomous" as if reflecting a special political dispensation, lack of the imperial portrait may have simply served as a denominational marker (Johnston 1985, 104; Nurpetlian 2017).

Governors are also represented on bronze coins not as simple monograms but with a full legend of *epi* + name (e.g., "under Silanus") next to the civic ethnic of Antioch and Seleucia Pieria (e.g., *RPC* I.4268, 4330). Issues of Berytus even explicitly print *permissu silani* or "by the permission of [the legate] Silanus" (*RPC* I.4541, 4544), a formula understood as granting the right to mint to the colony (Weiss 2005, 59). Use of the governor's name was neither widespread nor consistent on Syrian civic coins, especially after the first century AD. It may therefore indicate broad oversight, occasional administrative support, or simply a device to honor the governor or date the coin (Weiss 2005, 60–61; Harl 1987, 13–14). In any case, references to Roman administrators and emperors did not promote use of civic coins far beyond their issuing city. They remained local small change.

Even so, as the Roman state sought to better define and control the province of Syria in the first century AD, signs on both the bronze and silver indicate that money was an integral part of this process. Content as the Romans were to leave bronze civic production intact to alleviate the burden on the imperial administration (von Reden 2012, 274–276; Harl 1996, 88, 106–107), the mosaic of denominations across the region must have presented a challenge (Butcher 2002, 145–152; *RPC* I, 587–590). An experiment in provincial bronze coinage therefore began under Augustus to introduce a common, standardized currency to circulate alongside civic issues. This presumably would ease collection of taxes as well as encourage exchange within the region.

Most likely minted at Antioch with occasional supplies from the mint at Rome (McAlee 2007, 12–13; Carradice and Cowell 1987), these new coins should not be considered either civic or Antiochene at their introduction (Neumann 2021, 181–204). In fact, compared to the diversity of coins previously minted in Syria, these provincial bronzes are striking in their simplicity and similarity to those produced elsewhere in the eastern empire and even at Rome (Butcher 2004, 28–29; Burnett 2011, 9–11). Augustus's portrait with his name and titles in Latin grace the obverse; the reverse features either a Latin abbreviation or phrase surrounded by a standard Roman honorific wreath (McAlee 2007, 116–121). After Augustus, the iconography streamlined further into only one reverse type, the letters SC within a laurel wreath (fig. 8.2). The exact

significance of these letters is unknown. The imperial bronzes of Rome also feature an SC originally in reference to the decree of the senate (*senatus consulto*) authorizing minting during the republic, but later under the authority of the emperor (Bay 1972; Wolters 2012, 339–340). The SC on the provincial Syrian bronze may also reflect an imperial decree or at least mark the monetary guarantee of the Roman state (Wallace-Hadrill 1986, 80–83; Butcher 2004, 235–236).

How these provincial bronze coins circulated was poorly understood in the past with scholars ranging widely in their characterization, but a distribution study of their finds determines that their greatest use was within the narrow confines of Syria proper (Neumann 2021, 184–204). Sites like Berytus in Phoenicia, Palmyra in the desert, Zeugma in the north, and the Tetrapolis cities closer to the Mediterranean coast all yield noticeable quantities of the provincial bronzes in their otherwise idiosyncratic coin assemblages for the early Roman imperial period. These coins may have also spread farther east and north beyond the limits of the empire to places like Dura Europos. Legionary countermarks applied to the coins after their minting demonstrate that the Roman military made use of them (Howgego 1982; *RPC* I, 14), yet their consistent spread throughout Syria recommends administrative and civilian adoption as well. In fact, some civic communities appear to have preferred the provincial coins alongside or in lieu of their own civic issues (Neumann 2021, 193–194). Regular circulation beyond this point is unlikely, even in the southern Levant as previously believed.

The Augustan introduction of a new provincial bronze coinage did not immediately coincide with a revision of the silver currency. Production of autonomous silver gradually disappeared from most Syrian mints in the initial decades of the first century ad (see Prieur and Prieur 2000), but there is no reason to assume that the Roman administration was responsible for the cessation; these cities may have simply lacked the metal supplies to continue (Harl 1996, 103). Tyre did persist in striking its silver as before with the head of Heracles-Melqart on the obverse and the Ptolemaic eagle and civic ethnic on the reverse (fig. 8.1; *RPC* I.4632–4706). Antioch also maintained production of tetradrachms, albeit with both civic and Roman elements now mingling. Around 5 bc, the emperor's portrait replaced that of the dead Seleucid king on the obverse (fig. 8.2), while the occasional imperial family member alternated with the traditional reverse type of Zeus holding Nike (*RPC* I, 606–607). New dates based on the emperor's reign began appearing as well (see McAlee 2007, 111). The addition of these elements has been understood as a sign of Roman manipulation of the mint—thus making the Antioch issues less civic or autonomous than those at Tyre—but local direction cannot be ruled out. Select tetradrachms in the early first century ad featured the ethnic of the Antiochians plus their city's special title of *metropolis* (e.g., *RPC* I.4162) and the civic monogram (e.g., *RPC* I.4158). Additionally, Eutychides's statue of Tyche reappeared as an option for the coins' reverse (fig. 8.2).

Everything changed during the reign of Nero as silver minting at Tyre and Antioch finally unified into a single regional system. Production of civic issues at Tyre stopped completely, while the mint at Antioch now regularly struck tetradrachms with an imperial portrait on the obverse and the Ptolemaic eagle on the reverse (fig. 8.2). Hoard evidence suggests that these iconographical changes were accompanied by a critical shift in their circulation (Neumann 2021, 175–178). Tetradrachms minted at Antioch or Tyre before the reforms disappear completely from these deposits, suggesting that they were withdrawn from circulation (Butcher and Pontin g 2014, 548–549, 679). In their place, silver minted at Antioch after the reforms are now regularly discovered throughout Syria and the southern Levant, though still not in Egypt or Asia Minor where silver was struck according to a different standard.

Such a widescale restructuring appears orchestrated by the Roman administration as part of a larger currency reform to better align the denarius to existing provincial systems (Butcher an

d Ponting 2014, 678–681, 690–699). The denarius was regularly circulating as a physical coin in the Middle East by the end of the first century ad (*RPC* I, 587), yet inscriptional evidence indicates that taxes and other transactions could still be paid with local coin reckoned according to the Roman monetary standard (Matthews 1984; von Reden 2012, 273–276). Some scholars have concluded that by not replacing tetradrachms with denarii, the Romans sought to cultivate and control a closed currency system like the one in Egypt (Metcalf 2008; Katsari 2011, 186–190). This hypothesis is difficult to prove from the available evidence, but there can be no doubt that the Romans were now manipulating the production of Syrian silver and bronze with Antioch as their primary mint.

Coinage of Syria under the High Roman Empire

In the dynasties that followed the Julio-Claudians, Roman engagement with Syrian currency still did not end civic production. Instead, as Roman administrators, soldiers, and emperors increasingly came to the Middle East, more cities than ever before issued their own bronze coinage. Civic minting was never consistent and not all cities issued coins. Some cities relied on another mint to produce their coins, as appears to be the case with the Antioch mint striking for several northern cities and Philippopolis in Arabia (Butcher 2004, 47). Still, by the third century AD, at least twenty-five different Syrian communities issued their own bronze currency (Jones 1963, 309–310). This boom of civic production was not unique to Syria but rather manifested throughout the eastern Roman Empire (Johnston 2012, 453–455, 464–465). Some debate exists as to the exact financial pressures driving this production, whether these coins were to meet imperial demands or were in response to growing inflation and an increased need for small change (see the summary in Neumann 2021, 153–154, 228).

Far more certain is that these coins continued to serve as platforms for civic celebration in an increasingly competitive urban climate (Harl 1987, 83–88; Johnston 2012, 455–457). New formulations of complex civic identities appear beside established iconography and the imperial portrait (fig. 8.3). This includes myths important to specific cities, such as an Antiochene bronze portraying Daphne transforming into a laurel tree in honor of the city's famous suburb (McAlee 2007, no. 138) or a Tyrian coin referencing the Phoenician past by depicting Queen Dido in front of Carthage (*RPC* VI.8613 [temporary]). Local cults find prominence on these coins, like Elagabal or his baetyl on the bronzes of Emesa (*RPC* IV.3.8555, 9000 [temporary]), legends naming Lucian's Syrian goddess on the coins of Hierapolis (*RPC* III.3449), and a distinctly Phoenician Tyche on the coins of Berytus (Kropp 2015). Local festivals and competitions are invoked with prize crowns, such as the Helia Pythia at Emesa (*RPC* VI.8358 [temporary]) and the Actia Heraclia at Tyre (*RPC* VII.2.3592). Even local government finds representation as with the personification of the Antiochians' *boule* dropping a voting token into an urn (*RPC* I.4305, III.3737–3740).

FIGURE 8.3. Civic bronzes of Roman Syria. (a) Antoninus Pius/eagle on baetyl from Emesa; (b) Trajan/legend of Syrian goddess from Hierapolis; (c) Elagabalus/Phoenician Tyche in temple from Berytus; (d) Zeus/voting *boule* from Antioch. Credit: Gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Y 23879.243; Fonds général 430, 1661; Babelon 1298.

Alongside blended Greek and Syrian identities, these coins concurrently reveal their communities' orientation toward Rome. One clear example is the extension of new civic titles granted by the emperor (Kindler 1982–1983). For example, Antioch's once unique title of *metropolis* evolved into a reference to a city's involvement in the provincial *koinon* ("assembly") and imperial cult (Neumann 2021, 166–168). By the second century ad, other cities used their own coins to celebrate their newfound status as *metropolis*, including Tyre, Damascus, and Samosata. This was not a purely civic endeavor, as the mint of Rome was also commissioned during the time of Trajan to strike a coin bearing the legend *koinon syrias* and the bust of a crowned Tyche (Woytek 2011). Who commissioned the coin is unknown, whether a magistrate or civic community (see Butcher 2004, 148), but excavation finds suggest these bronzes circulated within Syria.

The coins also help demonstrate that the designation of *colonia* became increasingly important in the third century ad. Rather than indicating a resettlement of a city—as with Berytus—this later extension simply indicates imperial approval (Millar 2006, 164–222). Sidon, Tyre, Antioch, Damascus, Emesa, and Laodicea ad Mare were only a few of the cities of the eastern provinces to gain this title (Kindler 1982–1983). Based on when and how it was advertised on the civic coins, this promotion was considered essential as communities competed for imperial honors.

As civic bronzes flourished throughout Syria, the Romans seem to have abandoned their standardization experiment with the provincial SC coins by the end of the second century ad. Excavations reveal that over time, the percentage of finds represented by these provincial issues decreases at most sites in Syria in favor of local or neighboring civic coins (Neumann 2021, 196–204, 229–246). Only at Antioch does the presence of the provincial coins significantly

increase. Based on their diminishing distribution as well as iconographical changes in language and symbols, a strong case can be made that the Antiochians eventually assumed the provincial coins as part of their own civic issues—first as a larger denomination in the second century ad and then as a smaller denomination to their revamped civic bronzes of the third century ad.

The Roman administration instead focused on the production of silver coinage. While the exact structure of operations and oversight is still unclear, Antioch remained the major Syrian mint of provincial tetradrachms well into the third century ad with occasional contributions from places like Laodicea ad Mare and Tyre (Prieur and Prieur 2000, 130, 163–172). There is strong evidence that the mints at Alexandria in Egypt and Rome also periodically struck tetradrachms for Syria, which could indicate some form of imperial coordination even if this administration did not cover the cost of production (Butcher and Ponting 2014, 681–685). More evidence of Roman intervention emerges from the reign of Caracalla, when almost thirty different eastern cities struck silver tetradrachms. The most convincing explanation for this temporary expansion is that the imperial administration imposed a tax or a liturgy on these communities to fund the war against Parthia (Baldus 1973; Crawford 1975, 566).

The Syrian mints also eventually struck Roman imperial coins, but for purposes beyond the provinces. Tacitus (*Hist*. 2.80–82) records Vespasian's command of the Antioch mint to produce Roman aurei and denarii as he sought to claim the emperorship. The limited finds of these coins suggest that they were not intended for use in Syria but instead were directly tied to the military (Howgego 2015). Hadrian may have made similar use of the mint of Antioch, though this is less certain (Butcher 2004, 98). Another wave of denarii and aurei production began with Pescennius Niger's bid for emperor and Septimius Severus's operations against the Parthians; the attribution of silver denarii past this point is questionable (see the summary in Neumann 2021, 212–215). What is clear is that these Syrian-minted denarii—with their clear Roman iconography—did not stay in Syria but moved far west with campaigning troops.

By the reign of Gordian III, Antioch was the first provincial mint to strike imperial radiates (known also as *antoniniani*), debased silver coins first introduced to the Roman Empire under Caracalla (Bland 2012, 515–517, 526–531). The production in Syria may have initially been directed toward paying troops in the region but soon morphed into a major operation with multiple workshops at Antioch and possibly one other Syrian mint (McAlee 2007, 8–9). Based on their steady presence in both hoards and excavation assemblages, these radiates probably then circulated throughout the Middle East first and then slowly made their way into the western empire (Neumann 2021, 218–223).

The End of Provincial Coinage

The minting of imperial radiates within Syria signaled the beginning of the end for the rich numismatic tapestry of the province. By AD 270, the wider monetary crisis of the mid-third century AD as well as the weakening of municipal governments extinguished most civic and provincial coinage throughout the Roman Empire (Harl 1996, 136–157; Corbier 2005, 348). Even the radiate eventually failed, and through reforms begun under Diocletian, it was replaced by a new uniform imperial currency guaranteed throughout the entire empire (Reece 2006). Syria continued to play an important role in this production as Antioch became a major contributor in a decentralized network of mints for the imperial state. In striking contrast to earlier issues, coins now minted in Antioch are only distinguishable from those produced elsewhere by the control mark ANT. The wide distribution of these coins across the Roman

Empire extends from this uniformity as the Antioch-minted issues were interchangeable with all others bearing the imperial guarantee (Neumann 2021, 271–284). Likewise, coins struck at mints elsewhere in the empire easily flowed into Syria.

It is remarkable that we can discuss a uniform imperial currency only three hundred years after the Roman annexation of Syria. However, in reflecting on what had existed in the region throughout the previous centuries, we should be cautious not to over-compartmentalize these coins into Roman versus local, imperial versus civic, or tradition versus innovation. Instead, the coins minted and excavated within Syria manifest the evolution and negotiation of discrepant identities, political systems, and fiscal policies of communities and governments alike within the province.

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CHAPTER 9

PARTHIAN ART AND COINAGE

OLYMPIA BOBOU

Introduction

Parthia, a region in north-east Iran, became one of the superpowers of the ancient world under the rule of the Arsacid dynasty (247 BC–AD 224), challenging Rome for dominance in its eastern frontier (see Edwell, chapter 22, this volume). Its major centers, however, are not as well excavated as those of other empires of the period, with the result that the art and archaeology of Parthia is not as well known and studied compared to that of Rome or China (for an overview of the archaeology of and the major finds from Parthian sites, see Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). The capital Ctesiphon (from the first century AD to the fall of the Arsacid dynasty in AD 224) was almost completely built over by the Sasanians, and so there are almost no traces of its Parthian phase (Ellerbrock 2021, 141–142); excavations at Hekatompylos (Shahr- e Qumis) and Rhagae, where Arsacid rulers had their spring and autumn palaces, have revealed little evidence of Parthian art (Ellerbrock 2021, 137–138, see also Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). Only at Ecbatana have excavations revealed extensive Parthian-period structures (Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). In fact, the art of Edessa, the capital of the kingdom of Osroene that was allied to the Parthians until it became part of the Roman Empire in AD 213 (Healey 2009, 13–16), and that of Palmyra, a city that was in contact with the Parthians, have been used as a gateway into and a prism through which to study Parthian art (Ghirshman 1962; Colledge 1977; 1987). Hatra, a city under Parthian control for the first two centuries AD, was also used by scholars in the past as a representative example of Parthian art and architecture (Rostovtzeff 1935; Colledge 1977). According to Rostovtzeff, who based his observations mainly on the art of Dura Europos, and whose work influenced scholars for decades, Parthian art was linear and two-dimensional, with figures having the same height and placed one next to the other, facing the viewer frontally, and wearing richly decorated clothes and jewelry (Rostovtzeff 1935, 182, 235–238). Recent studies, though, have shown how the art of these cities in particular expresses local elite ideologies that may incorporate Roman and/or Parthian elements in the typology and iconography of their monuments without becoming derivative (for Hatra, see Dirven 2013; 2016; Ellerbrock 2021, 146–152; Dirven, chapter 34, this volume; for Edessa, see Segal 1970; Blömer 2022; Bobou, Healey, and Raja 2023; for Palmyra, see Raja 2022 with previous bibliography). For this reason, scholars have been moving away from the notion of an art with common features that was diffused from the Parthian center to its periphery, and discuss instead, the art of the "Parthian commonwealth" (Ellerbrock 2021, 214; Colburn 2020). For this chapter, however, I use the term "Parthian art" as a shorthand for the art produced in the various centers of the Parthian Empire.

The Art of the Royal Court

It is impossible to discuss Parthian art without starting with the old capital of the kingdom Nisa, partly because it is so well excavated and its finds so well published, but also because it is the only royal center that has survived and left us evidence of Arsacid dynastic art (on the history of the excavations and the teams that have worked on the site, see Pilipko 1994; Pilipko 2001; Invernizzi 2010; Lippolis 2011a). Nisa was most likely founded by Mithradates I (165–132 BC) (Pilipko 2008; Bruno 2021, 67), and the monumental complex can be dated at some point after his death (Pilipko 1994, 110; Bruno 2021, 69; for the buildings and the major finds from there, see Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume; see also Canepa 2018, 235–238). While there was a unified plan, the first building to be erected was the so-called Red Building, while other buildings were constructed later (Bruno 2021, 69; the date of the construction of the Square House is not certain: Pappalardo 2010, 7; on the chronology of the complex, see also Lippolis 2011b). There are several features shared by the main buildings of the complex, the Red Building, the Tower Building, the Square Hall, the Round Hall, and the Square House (see Pilipko 2001; Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008). The first is a technical feature: the buildings were constructed by mud bricks that were plastered and sometimes also covered by stone slabs. The second is their polychromy. The plastered walls were then painted in bright, vivid colors: red, purple, ochre predominate, while yellow, black, pink, and blue were used for the details. White was also used extensively in the Round and the Square Halls. The stone slabs were also decorated: in the Red Building, they have a continuous row of flutes under a bead-and-reel motif painted in bright ochre, red, and black. Architectural details made of clay were also painted and gilded, such as the metopes from the Red Building and the Square Hall. The polychromy served to accentuate and organize the architectural space: the edges of the walls were delineated, the structure of the building was emphasized, and the division between, for example, white and purple sections of the walls, drew the attention of the viewers to the focal points of the room, which, in the case of the Round and the Square Halls, were the over-life-size painted statues of the founder and his family (Lippolis 2011b; Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008). A third feature that was common in all the main buildings was the combination of Greek and Iranian elements, often with the subordination of the Greek architectural and decorative details to an overall Iranian or Persian concept of space. The Greek elements were also used in ways that were unique and not seen in Greek/Hellenistic architecture. For example, in the Red Building, while flutings and bead-and-reel moldings are typically Greek, their combination has no parallels from the Greek world (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008, 150, 385). The combination of wooden columns on stone bases and the arrangement of the rooms is typically Persian or Iranian (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008, 142, 385). Another example of the coexistence of two different pictorial and architectural traditions can be seen in the Tower Building. Several fragments originating from the upper stories of the Tower Building show that there were at least two painted cycles with very different themes and following two different figural traditions. The first is a wall painting depicting an equestrian battle with the men dressed in Parthian tunics and trousers, one of them turning backward on his horse to shoot his arrow (a depiction of the famous Parthian shot). The second is a fragment with a head and part of a Greek inscription. While the fragments of the battle painting show a more linear and flat rendering of the space and the figures, the fragment with the head is more in line with Hellenistic paintings aiming to render the bodies and faces in a realistic way that shows them almost as if emerging out of the flat, pictorial surface (Invernizzi 2010; 2011, 200–203).

Fragments of sculptures were recovered from almost all of the main buildings, although it is not always certain if they belonged there. That is the case with the statue fragments

originating from the Red Building (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008, 186). The hundreds of fragments of at least six clay, over life-size statues that were found in or close to the Round Hall give a glimpse of the art of the early Arsacid court. The torsos are constructed of layers of clay placed around a core, most likely made of wood; the limbs and heads were made separately and attached to the bodies after the initial preparation and smoothing of the clay layers. Details such as elaborate folds or curls or fingers were also made separately, using stamps or molds, and attached to the statues. The last step was the coloring: the statues were covered with a mixture of caolin and gypsum, which created a white surface on which paint was added: different hues of red, brown, pink, blue, yellow, and black have been detected and analyzed (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008, 195–196). This technique has also been observed in the clay statues from Ai-Khanoum indicating that this was a regional response and solution to the lack of good stone and marble for making statues. The statues follow late classical and Hellenistic types and the way that garments and faces are treated also shows that they were created by artists trained in Greek styles (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2008, 195–197; Invernizzi 2011; Bruno 2021, 71). One of the fragments has been identified as belonging to a statue of Mithradates I, leading to the interpretation that they all commemorated and celebrated members of the Arsacid dynasty. The chronological sequence of their placement cannot be established, however, and it is likely that, after an initial group set up to honor Mithradates and his ancestors, more statues were set up in the Round Hall (Invernizzi 2011; Lippolis 2011b). Another gallery of painted clay statues was located in the Square Hall, based on the surviving fragments. One head shows a young man with flowing locks of hair and a short moustache and beard; two others show men wearing helmets, one with a thunderbolt on the cheek-piece and the other with an armed winged creature with snakes or tendrils instead of legs. All these follow Hellenistic trends in the treatment of hair and the depiction of large, wide eyes. It has been suggested that because there were no markers of royal power, such as a diadem or a torque, then they cannot have been portraits and were perhaps depicting a mythological battle scene, probably one inspired by Greek myths (Pilipko 1994, 108–110; 2002).

These four buildings were located on the south side of the hill; to the north side was the Square House. Its date is not certain; however, it seems that in the first century ad its function changed from a banqueting hall to a treasury (Pappalardo 2010, 7). Fragments of marble statues and a group of forty-eight ivory rhyta were found in this building. These are among the most spectacular objects found in Nisa and combine local craftsmanship with Greek-style imagery and style (see also Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume).

Overall, the objects from Nisa reflect the successful and fruitful merging of two distinct stylistic, iconographic, and technical traditions. This is obvious from the large-scale architectural monuments, where Greek-style moldings and details are incorporated into buildings with Persian features, such as the wooden columns and the covered courtyards, the wall paintings, and the particular technique of building monumental statues out of clay layers, but also from the small-scale objects. The use of local stones and imported marble is shown by the statuette of a half-dressed goddess wringing her wet hair made of two types of stone; this also implies the transference of knowledge between Greek and Parthian sculptors (for the statuette, see Invernizzi 2009, 3–42). The local techniques and Greek iconography used for the rhyta testify to that also (Pappalardo 2010). One should not see, however, the use of Greek imagery as evidence of adoption of Greek culture. In the architecture, Greek-style decoration is confined to friezes and moldings (the extent of Greek-style wall paintings is not known and may have been less significant than those with Parthian subject matters; see also Lippolis 2009 for the architecture). The large-scale sculptures were used in a context glorifying the founder and his dynasty, a practice that has both Hellenistic and Achaemenic antecedents (Invernizzi 2016; Kawami 2016), while the small statues may have been Parthian deities, with the half-dressed

goddess mentioned above identified as Anahita rather than Aphrodite (Ellerbrock 2022, 214, 224). As for the rhyta, the type has a long tradition of use in Iran, perhaps even originating from there (Jaeger 2016), and the Greek gods depicted on the friezes around the rims may have been assimilated to Parthian ones (Pappalardo 2010, 157–159; see also Manassero 2018 on the fusion of the two traditions; Ellerbrock 2021, 215–220).

Another evidence of Arsacid-sponsored art may be seen at Bisotun, on a rock-cut relief, on which King Vologases makes a sacrifice. He wears a raised cap with flaps; in addition, his hair is tied back with a ribbon, which is typical of kings in Arsacid coinage. There were six kings with the name Vologases: Kawami (2013, 755) suggests the identification of the figure with either Vologases III or IV on stylistic criteria (Mathiesen 1992, 175 is more cautious). The relief at Khung-i Nauruzī, which shows a rider with a diadem approaching four standing figures may not represent the king Mithradates, as has been suggested, and so it cannot be seen as representative of royal art (on this relief, see Mathiesen 1992, 15–18, 20–21, 119–121; Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). Also most likely not sponsored by the king is a stele from Susa, which shows the local dynast Xwāsak (or Khwasak) receiving a ring from King Artabanus IV in ad 215; this has been interpreted as a scene of investiture to the satrapy of Susa (Mathiesen 1992, 168–169, cat. no. 87; Ellerbrock 2021, 63). The examination of the rock-cut and carved stone reliefs shows that the figures are not characterized by strict frontality and isocephaly, and that the sculptors were careful to depict the movement of bodies in space, giving the profile and/or three-quarter views of the various limbs in order to achieve that. The Vologases relief at Bisotun is a perfect example of that style (for Parthian rock-cut reliefs, see Mathiesen 1992; Kawami 2013) (fig. 9.1).

FIGURE 9.1. Stone relief of Vologases, at Bisotun. While the face, torso, and upper legs are shown frontally, the arms and feet show how the figure is sculpted in mid-motion during the act of sacrificing.

Jona Lendering. Images shared under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0: https://vici.org/image.php?id=13338.

The Art of Local Dynasts

Most of the other evidence of Parthian art that has survived comes from areas under the rule of local dynasts and warlords and gives an impression of the wealth and resources of these kings. Apart from the rock-cut reliefs, the architectural remains of their palaces and their decorations, a number of objects from their courts have survived ranging from bronze statues and luxury items made in precious metals to objects used in everyday life and funeral rituals. The precious metal objects, because of their value, and smaller objects, because of their transportability, were and are often illicitly excavated and sold on the art market, thus losing most of their archaeological significance. One case of such an object is the so-called treasure of the Kārēn-Pahlaw family, one of the seven Great Houses of Iran: a large number of objects and gold coins were discovered in 1910 or 1911 and were subsequently sold and dispersed or melted down. The find-spot near Nihavand led Ernst Herzfeld to connect the precious objects with the family of the Kārēn-Pahlaw who ruled the region (Hertzfeld 1928; Ghirshman 1962, 100; Curtis 2001, 306) (fig. 9.2).

FIGURE 9.2. Gold belt adornment. Together with a matching roundel with an eagle, now at the British Museum, London, it formed part of the "Kārēn-Pahlaw" treasure.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, acc. no. 17.190.2055. Image in the public domain: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322485.

Other objects are clearly Parthian in origin, based on their mingling of Greek style in the rendering of the figures on objects that are traditionally Iranian; among these are a number of silver or silver and gilded rhyta that have found their way to various museums through the art market. Such pieces remain completely without context and cannot be associated with either a royal or a local dynastic center (see, for example, Pfrommer 1993; Carter and Harper 2018).

When the art is contextualized, however, it can give important information about Parthian practices, even if it cannot be associated with the name of a particular Great House or ruler. Such an example of the art of local princely courts was found at Shami; the excavation of a building there revealed an almost two-meter-tall bronze statue of a dynast as well as several heads and limbs and a fragmentary statuette. The ruler is depicted wearing a typical costume for a Parthian: a long-sleeved tunic, trousers, and over-trousers, a necessary garment for riders. He is also wearing a torque, which is a symbol of power (for Parthian costume, see Curtis 1988; 1998; 2000). Analysis of the almost complete statue of the ruler shows that the metal composition of the head and the body were different, leading to the hypothesis that the body was locally produced while the head was imported. The placement of the statues on bases inside an enclosed area can be compared to the placement of the statues in the Square

and the Round Halls of Nisa. The structure has been interpreted as a sanctuary and the statues set up in honor of the local prince's family were the result of its continuous use for several decades (see Mathiesen 1992, 166–168, cat. nos. 80–86, with previous bibliography, for the statue of the prince and the other fragments; see also Kawami 2016; Lindström 2017; Canepa 2018, 238–239).

Another significant site is that of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird (see also Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). The excavations there revealed the remnants of a fortified palace complex dating near the end of the Arsacid period, decorated richly with stucco work that was found in fragments in various deposits, perhaps as a result of repair works. The fragments indicated that the architecture of three of the rooms in particular was emphasized through the use of stuccoed decoration, with different geometric and floral patterns indicating the articulation of space, placed as they were on moldings, projecting pillars, and niches (Keall 1977; Keall, Leveque, and Willson 1980). In addition to those, the portrait of a man wearing a diadem and of several women were located; these were placed inside medallions and could have represented the owner of the complex and female relatives (Kaim 2016, 93). A third group of stuccoes represented figures from the Dionysiac sphere: Pan, Erotes with a feline, a man reclining under vines (Dionysos?), as well as naked female dancers and male dancers in Parthian dress evoke the carefree world of the banquet (Kaim 2016).

Arsacid Coinage

Perhaps the most important vehicle of royal ideology and power was coinage (Olbrycht 2021, 241). There are multiple documented mint centers in the Parthian commonwealth, with those of the royal capitals Nisa, Hekatompylos, Ekbatana, and Ctesiphon directly under the control of the Arsacid rulers, and other mints used during the king's travels or campaigns (Sinisi 2018, 476; Ellerbrock 2021, 169). There are two crucial factors behind the emergence of Parthian coinage: the first is the capture of Seleucid mints, which allowed Arsacid rulers to use already existing technological knowledge and installations, and the second the acquisition of areas rich in gold and silver (Sinisi 2018, 474; Olbrycht 2021, 241–243). The different needs and itinerant nature of the Arsacid court, evidenced by the existence of four different palaces, resulted in two different trajectories in the production of coinage: while from the time of Mithradates II (r. 124–91 BC), the production of large denomination silver coins (tetradrachms) was limited in the areas of the former Seleucid kingdom, smaller denomination coins were produced across the Parthian territory (Sinisi 2018, 474–476; Ellerbrock 2021, 169). The weight of the coins was based on the Seleucid ones, themselves following the Attic standard, and they were made of silver, bronze, and copper (Rezakhani 2013, 767; for a list of values and weights, see Ellerbrock 2021, 166). No gold coins have been found so far. A gold coin of Gotarzes I (r. 95–90 BC) found at Tillya Tepe, may have been a local imitation rather than a Parthian issue (Alram 1998, 372; for the connections between Parthia and the individuals buried at Tillya Tepe, see Frankfort 201 2; Olbrycht 2016).

Influenced by Seleucid coinage, Arsaces I (r. 247–217 bc) created the model for the coins issued by his successors (Rezakhani 2013, 767; for the types, see Sellwood 1980 and Sellwood 1989; his classification is still in use: Olbrycht 2021, 243). On the obverse, the king is shown in profile. He wears a soft cap, called in Greek sources *kyrbasia*, headgear worn by satraps in Achaemenid iconography. His cap, however, is tied with the ribbon signifying royal power from the Hellenistic period onward, the diadem. In the earliest issues (Sellwood type 1), the king is shown facing to the viewer's right, while in later types he is shown facing to the viewer's left

(Sellwood types 2–4). Facing left becomes the norm for subsequent issues (Rezakhani 2013, 768; there are exceptions, however, such as the coins of Mithradates I, Sellwood type 12, and of Artabanus I, Sellwood type 21, where the king faces to the right). Another change that can be traced to the rule of Mithradates I is that the king begins to appear bearded (from the issues belonging to Sellwood type 11 onward).

FIGURE 9.3 a–b. Silver drachm of Mithradates I. In the obverse, the king is shown waring a diadem. The obverse has the image of a seated, beardless archer—a portrait of Arsaces I?
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898, acc. no. 99.35.2953. Image in the public domain: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322351.

Mithradates II (r. 124–91 bc) was the first king to introduce the diadem and the tiara in the royal iconography. Sellwood types 23–27 of Mithradatic coinage, show him wearing only a diadem (fig. 9.3), while in later types, he is depicted wearing a tiara, a closed, high cap decorated with a star and dots, possibly indicating gems, which was worn together with a diadem (Sellwood types 28–29; Olbrych 1997, 30). From the reign of Phraates IV (ca. 38–7 bc) two more symbols are added to the royal iconography: a dot on the forehead (the "royal wart" as it is called by scholars), as well as a star and a crescent (Rezakhani 2013, 770).

On the reverse, the king is shown seated holding a bow (Rezakhani 2013, 767; Olbrych 202 1, 243). In the earliest types, he is seated on a stool with turned legs (Sellwood, types 1–6). During the reign of Mithradates I this changes to a seat resembling the omphalos (Rezakhani 2 013, 769). The seat type was changed again to a seat with turned legs and a back, a proper throne, from the reign of Mithradates II (r. 124–91 bc) onward. Instead of his own portrait, King Phraataces (r. 2 bc–ad 4) had a bust portrait of his mother, Queen Musa, and he was the only one to do so (Sellwood type 58; Rezakhani 2013, 770). Apart from royal portraits on the reverse, other types are inspired by Greek models and show Apollo seated on an omphalos (coins of Phraates II, r. 138–127 bc, Sellwood type 14), or the more popular Nike crowning a deity identified as Tyche/Demeter (Sellwood type 18: from 127–125 bc, Sellwood type 21: coins of Artabanus I, r. 127–124 bc; Sellwood type 23: coins of Mithradates II). Other series were inspired by Parthian imagery (beardless archer on omphalos wearing satrapal headgear [portrait of Arsaces I?] on coins of Artabanus I: Sellwood type 20), while coins of Mithradates

III (r. 57–54 bc) show a Nike crowning a seated king (Sellwood type 41), and coins of Orodes II (r. 57–38 bc) show Tyche either kneeling in front of a seated king (Sellwood type 45) or presenting a palm branch to him (Sellwood type 46).

The language of the inscriptions was another Seleucid legacy, with the names and titles appearing in Greek on the coins of the earlier kings. Arsaces I used the title *autokrator*—a military title denoting that the holder had independent command—as well as the Iranian title *krny*, translated into Greek as *karanos* and also meaning lord commander of the army (Rezakhani 2013, 767; Olbrych 2021, 248–250). The literary sources make clear that Arsaces was crowned, and this has led scholars to propose that his kingship was based on Iranian traditions and concepts, and the titles chosen were those that would appeal to his Iranian people (Olbrycht 2021, 252; *contra* Rezakhani 2013, 767, who sees the use of titles as suggesting "an initial submission to Seleucid suzerainty"). While the term *krny* was not used again in Parthian coinage, the term *autokrator* was used much later, in times when kingship was contested between successors (Olbrycht 2021, 249). Arsaces's successors used the title *basileus*, king, often with epithets such as "great," "just," "benefactor." Mithradates I also appears as "friend of the Greeks," while Tiridates I (r. 29–26 bc) presents himself as a "friend of the Romans" (Rezakhani 2013, 767–768; Olbrycht 2021, 254; Ellerbrock 2021, 170 and 171 for a list of the Greek titles that appear in the coinage). They also all used the name Arsaces, essentially turning it into a dynastic title (Olbrycht 2021, 252–254). Parthian as a language on coins is used only during the reign of Arsaces I and after the reign of Vologases I (r. ad 51–79), eventually replacing Greek, which becomes illegible (Rezakhani 2013, 771; Ellerbrock 2021, 169).

Some Concluding Remarks

While scholars have been moving away from the tenets of a unified Parthian art proposed by Rostovtzeff, even the briefest and most selective of surveys, such as this, shows that there are some elements that indicate the presence of features that were popular across the Parthian Empire. The incorporation of Greek stylistic characteristics and minor architectural details is one of them; in coinage, it is the use of Greek language and Greek symbols and iconography, such as the omphalos or the Tyche or the Victory figure. The delight in elaborately decorated surfaces, evident in architecture, sculpture, and applied arts is another. A third one is the articulation and structuring of built spaces and surfaces through the use of color and decorative motifs, be they geometric, floral, architectural, or figural. They appear in the finds from Nisa, Shami, or Qal'eh-i Yazdigird, hinting at an artistic style that transcends local habits and trends. At the same time, each center has its own characteristics: old Nisa, the capital built by the "friend of the Greeks" Mithradates I, is the city with the most obvious and abundant markers of Hellenistic Greek culture; these have been completely relegated to decorative elements in the much later fortress of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird. In the coinage, even though the legends are in Greek, the king's portrait on the obverse and most of the images used on the reverse point toward an Iranian concept of kingship, begun by Arsaces I and continued by his successors. Furthermore, the influence of Parthian art and its characteristic of fruitfully merging multiple cultural and visual languages and traditions is found often outside of Parthia, in its allies and vassal states (see Dirven, chapter 34, this volume, and Leriche, chapter 31, this volume).

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CHAPTER 10

THE SASANIAN EMPIRE AND ITS ART

ANNE HUNNELL CHEN

The Challenges of Sasanian Art

A relative historical paucity of controlled excavations at Sasanian sites is at the root of many problems in the study of Sasanian art. While archaeological work has been undertaken at select Sasanian sites, especially since the 1920s (Huff 1986; Mousavi and Darayee 2012), two factors can account, in part, for the fact that Sasanian sites have received less attention than those associated with other ancient cultures. First, from a historiographic perspective, interest in Sasanian material within Western academic tradition has been limited due to the material's uncomfortable fit with prevailing taxonomies of Graeco-Roman/Near Eastern/Islamic art (Sauer et al. 2013). Second, modern armed conflict has made many Sasanian sites largely inaccessible for prolonged periods and caused irreparable damage to monuments that had yet to receive the scientific attention they deserved (Canepa 2018, 368). Ironically, inaccessibility and loss have come at precisely the moment of growing Western appreciation for those cultures, like the Sasanians, that challenge traditional taxonomies.

Relatedly, and problematically, the majority of transportable Sasanian art objects have not been recovered from controlled contexts. Lacking a verifiable chain of custody from archaeological site to acquisition, at worst, the authenticity of many of the finest Sasanian objects has come into question (Muscarella 2012), and at best, the loss of valuable contextual information condemns many such artifacts to interpretational limbo. Without archaeological context, such artifacts generally lack any external means of chronological evaluation or information about use and/or reuse, thus limiting the ways scholars can responsibly engage with them.

In the absence of excavations in their vicinity, interpretation of art objects still in situ (like monumental imperial rock reliefs) is likewise stymied. Without stratigraphic information that could throw light on persistent questions such as periods of construction and use that could validate or refute iconographically based arguments, the subject matter of many reliefs remains hotly debated.

Additionally, the high proportion of Sasanian works without a secure context, combined with a traditional disciplinary inclination to treat artistic media in isolation, has tended to obfuscate the role that Sasanian art played in its overall visual environment. Wherever possible, the discussion in this chapter follows the lead of recent synthesizing work (Canepa 2009; 2018), discussing Sasanian art in the context of the built and natural spaces it was part of.

Finally, reliance on Sasanian art and architecture preserved in situ or lacking secure context means that our knowledge is based primarily on elite (especially imperial) artistic production (Huff 1986; Harper 1986). Without archaeological studies actively trained on non-imperial contexts, the lives of whole hosts of the Sasanian population, especially non-elites and women, remain largely unelucidated by the traditional Sasanian artistic corpus. Fortunately, this picture is changing with important new archaeological work undertaken in areas free from modern conflict, including Merv (Turkmenistan) and spaces along the Caucasus frontiers (Sauer et al. 2

013; Simpson 2014; Puschnigg 2017). While such studies are an important corrective step, given the known regional variation in Sasanian products, the limited range of sites available for excavation leaves wide gaps in our knowledge of the visual and material worlds confronted by those outside the court (Mousavi and Darayee 2012, 1076).

However, hope for wrangling meaningful information from Sasanian art, even works untethered from a verifiable context, is not lost. In addition to filling blind spots, new archaeological work is providing data that help retroactively supply a partial re-contextualization for unexcavated objects. Recent work on the Gorgān Wall, for instance, has suggested it served not simply as a terrestrial defense but also as security for maritime trade across the Caspian Sea and on the Volga River, thus lending credence and a modicum of context to the volume of Sasanian gold, silver, and coinage purportedly found in Russia (Sauer et al. 2013, 601–605).

Iconographic and epigraphic analysis has also yielded plausible arguments relevant to the subject matter and chronology of objects that lack archaeological context. Decontextualized objects can be especially difficult to date or even conclusively class as Sasanian since the arts of the Sasanian court famously inspired imitations and adaptations among neighboring peoples in their own time and in the arts of cultures even after the fall of the Sasanian Empire (Huff 1986; Schippman 1993; De Waele 2009; Compareti 2011, 26–37; Alram 2015; Compareti 2016, 79; Canepa 2018, 341–342). Important in this regard was the discovery that Sasanian kings bore personalized crowns that can be helpful for identification purposes. Numismatic material, featuring as it does a continuous trajectory of linked royal names and images, has allowed scholars to establish a schema for the usual appearance of each king's individualized crown. Sasanian crowns symbolized royal *xwarrah*, the divine, mystical power that aided the Persian monarch, and consisted of three distinctive parts (Peck 1993; Alram 2015, 6–9): a personalized component that demonstrated the king's affinity for a particular divine patron and/or association with a royal predecessor; the *korymbos* (a cloth-covered mass of curls bound above the head); and a diadem with fluttering ribbons (figs 10.1–10.2).

FIGURE 10.1. Silver obverse of a coin of Shapur I, ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

FIGURE 10.2. Silver plate with mercury gilding, depicting Yazdgerd I slaying a stag; **AD** 399–420. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1970.6. Public domain.

However, crown iconography cannot always definitively answer questions of chronology. Not all rulers adhered to a single, unchanging crown type throughout their reign (Göbl 1983, 324–327; Peck 1993). Sasanian rulers also likely wore different headgear in battle and in court appearances (von Gall 2008). Helmets, however, were not regularly depicted on coinage, so it is impossible to integrate this headgear into the schema of individualized crowns. Moreover, some monarchs, especially later kings, adopted components of earlier rulers' personal crowns. What today appear to be interchangeable components would have been distinguished by coloration differences no longer preserved on extant artifacts (Harper and Meyers 1981, 65–66, 125; Peck 1993). Also, the depiction of a ruler's crown can only be assumed as an index of subject matter, not the chronology of the image. Presumably, a posthumous depiction would have represented a king's crown in his characteristic manner.

In a case such as the latter hypothetical, or in the absence of a royal figure, learned art historical investigation has identified details, stylistic and otherwise, associated with specific chronological and/or geographic parameters. Grounded by comparison with artifacts deemed contextually or chronologically secure, the presence of such criteria on an object lacking secure context can be used to hypothesize about an otherwise obscure object biography. For instance,

Sasanian court artists' manner of rendering drapery on silver, featuring short, paired lines to give the impression of texture, is distinctive from the way drapery is depicted on silver elsewhere (fig. 10.2; Harper 1986). Likewise, the precise method of depicting king Šāpur I's hairstyle has been proposed as a useful chronological marker (Garosi 2012, 27). Other iconographic details have archaeological analogues, like weaponry and horse harnesses, that can be used to support the authenticity of suspect objects and postulate chronology (Mode 2006; Grenet 2007, 249). This extrapolative methodology must be used cautiously since it is only as secure as the interpretation of those objects that establish the baseline.

Inscriptions, where available, can likewise be a gold mine of information, especially in the absence of archaeological data. Analysis of letter forms, phraseology, and content can provide clues to an object's subject matter and/or chronology. However, even epigraphic evidence is not always straightforward. Inscribed information sometimes conflicts with iconographic evidence. For instance, a silver vessel in the Hermitage has imagery placing its manufacture in the third century, but bears a Sogdian inscription dating to the sixth–seventh centuries (Harper 1983, 1121). Similarly, a rock relief at Bīšāpūr bears an inscription of King Narseh that likely results from that monarch's reworking of a predecessor's relief (Canepa 2018, 267). Thus, reading inscriptions and data mined by visual analysis together can sometimes intimate the complex life cycles of objects whose context is otherwise lost.

Finally, scientific techniques have contributed to knowledge about objects with unsatisfactory contextual documentation. While scientific analysis is not a foolproof indication of authenticity (Muscarella 2008), results from neutron activation analysis have, for instance, shown that silver vessels stylistically judged as deriving from a centralized state workshop have distinctive metallic compositional traits. The consistency of the findings regarding the single-source composition of those objects lends weight both to the supposition of their authenticity and to the iconographic methods used in their earlier assessment (Harper and Meyers 1981, 144–186; Harper 1986). With these cautionary and methodological notes in mind, we turn now to an overview of different genres of Sasanian artistic production.

Multi-media Visual Environments: Imperial and Sacred Spaces

Sasanian imperial and sacred architectures developed side by side and were mutually influential. Palaces and major fire temples utilized some of the same spatial configurations, decorative materials (stucco, mosaic, wall painting, and carved stone), and related iconographies to create spaces designed to awe and inspire the viewer (Canepa 2018, 271–290, 324–344).

Imperial Spaces and Their Elite Imitators

Imperial palaces were built using spatial forms and guiding principles that could be variously configured to allow the resulting architectural space to respond sensitively to its unique environment (Canepa 2018, 325). Entry was provided via a façade with either a single or triple *ayvan*, a barrel-vaulted space walled on three sides. The *ayvan* generally fronted a block of subsequent rooms including a large central hall directly accessible from the *ayvan* and roofed with either a vault or a dome held aloft on squinches. The *ayvan* likely functioned as a reception area for events like public audiences hosted by the king, while the imposing central space may have served various purposes at different times, such as a throne room and a banqueting space (Huff 1986b; Canepa 2018, 331–332).

Limited archaeological information paired with Byzantine and Muslim written sources offers a hint of the visual environment created in public areas of the palace that served to project the power of the Sasanian king and the place he claimed for himself and his empire within the interconnected late antique world (Ṭabarī 2440, 2441, 2443; Balāḏorī, *Fotūḥ*, 262; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 321–322; Canepa 2018, 324–344). Painted stucco was the most dominant means of architectural ornamentation throughout the Sasanian era, including in palaces (Huff 1986b). Stucco relief was mold-formed for later attachment to walls and ceilings, resulting in repetitive and persistent motifs (Harper 1986). The earliest datable stuccos come from two palaces of the first Sasanian ruler, Ardašīr I, where non-figural stucco mouldings that echo Achaemenid style were part of a larger ideological effort to gain legitimacy for the nascent dynasty by linking them to illustrious predecessors (Kröger 1982, 197–198, plate 91.8; Huff 1986b; Canepa 2018, 255–257). Excavations in Mesopotamia have supplied a rich repertoire of figural and non-figural stucco associated with palaces of the fifth and sixth centuries, including hunters on horseback, large double-sided rosettes with palmettes, and kings' busts (Kröger 1982, 22–30, 187–188; 1986).

Comments by Muslim and Byzantine authors match well with physical iconographic evidence, and further indicate that stucco relief and mosaics were juxtaposed, at least in late palaces (Ṭabarī 2443, 2441; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 321–322; Theophylact Simocatta 5.6.10; Canepa 2018, 337 n. 69). A ninth-century eyewitness described the Ṭāq-e Kesrā palace's *ayvan* as decorated with sculpture and "pictures" portraying Antioch and a green-clad mounted Sasanian king placed before ranks of Persians and Byzantines (Qazwīnī, *Athār al bilād* 2.304; Canepa 2018, 331). It is unclear whether this two-dimensional design was mosaic or painted and how it may have worked programmatically with the space's stuccos. Tesserae found at the site corroborate the medium's use but do not clarify the specific appearance or placement of the Ṭāq-e Kesrā's mosaics. Walls with mosaics and ceilings studded with gold-glass tesserae produced an impressive shimmering effect in wealthy homes at Ctesiphon and suggest the decorative configurations presumably also used at the nearby palace (Harper 1986). Additionally, a structure excavated south of the palace's *ayvan* and associated with remains that indicate it was adorned with mosaic, opus sectile, marble revetment, and painted walls may have been a pavilion for the king's throne amid palatial grounds, possibly incorporating cosmic imagery (Canepa 2018, 336–340).

Figural wall painting was also a striking component of the visual environment created in imperial spaces. Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus remarks upon paintings of the hunting Sasanian king in what was likely an imperial structure (Amm. Marc. 24.6). Wall paintings have been excavated at only seven sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria, mainly from non-imperial contexts. A painting depicting two women, a man, and a child with a calf, interpreted as members of the Sasanian royal family and dated to Ardašīr I's reign, was discovered in a structure interpreted as a palace at Firuzabad (De Waele 2009). Ayvān-e Kerkha, site of Šāpur II's newly founded city Ērān-Xwarrah-Šābuhr, preserves fragments of fourth-century wall painting including human figures from what may have been an official reception pavilion (Ghirshman 1952, 10–11; 1962, 183; De Waele 2009). An account based on an official Byzantine history of the seventh century, read together with a tenth-century visitor's recollection, suggests that the late Sasanian palace adjacent to the fire temple at Ādur Gušnasp (identified with Taḵt-e Solaymān) contained a vaulted audience hall painted with a portrait of Ḵosrow II amid celestial and natural imagery (Nikephorus 12.41–49; Masʿūdī, *Tanbih*, 95; Canepa 2018, 335). At Ctesiphon, besides the mural fragments associated with the presumed throne pavilion south of Ṭāq-e Kesrā, wall painting was also found in an imperial bathhouse (Upton 1932, 193; Schmidt 1934, 18; De Waele 2009).

The interior decoration of elite residences has survived in a better state of preservation than in palaces. Since aristocratic homes mimic the spatial components of royal architecture (Canepa 2018, 324–325), the character of décor excavated at the so-called Villa Royale in Susa, and wealthy residences at Hājiābād, Tepe Hissar, and Maʿāredh in Ctesiphon may, in addition to bearing on elite interests, broaden our sense of decorative possibilities in contemporary imperial spaces. Evidence from these sites spans the Sasanian era and confirms the simultaneous use of figural and ornamental stucco alongside painted murals with hunting scenes, celestial imagery, *en-face* portrait busts, a rider portrayed in a "flying gallop," a combat scene, and geometric and floral patterns. (Schmidt and Kimball 1937; Azarnoush 1994, 92, 167–182; Gropp 2005; Kröger 2005; De Waele 2009). Stucco motifs that recurred in Mesopotamian elite homes of the later period included busts and figures of ladies, animals, rosettes, and Pahlavi monograms (Kröger 2005). The preponderance of evidence indicates that the public areas of elite residences received decorative stucco or painted mural decoration, suggesting that imagery was likely chosen for its decorative and ideological value (De Waele 2009).

The multi-media environment of later Sasanian palaces was further animated with impressive carpets and the monarch's hanging crown, aspects now only known from written testimonies (Theophanes, *Chronicle* 322; Ṭabarī 2446, 2448, 2452–2454; Canepa 2009 130–144, 301–302 n. 128). A huge, late Sasanian carpet measuring 60 cubits and evocatively described as showing a garden complete with streams and paths, studded with embedded gems, and embroidered with foliage in silk, silver, and gold, was taken by Muslim armies from the Ṭāq-e Kesrā. This massive carpet presumably covered the floor of the Ṭāq-e Kesrā's enormous *ayvan* and was experienced together with the room's stucco, mosaic, and painted decoration (Canepa 2018, 331). Archaeological evidence adds little to our understanding of this medium. Carpet fragments have been excavated at only a single, non-imperial site (Rubinson 1990).

Luxurious adornment of the king's person served the cosmologically grounded, ideological purpose of visually manifesting his *xwarrah* but also augmented the awe-inspiring environment that one would experience in his presence (Canepa 2018, 332–333). The gold, silver, pearl, and gemstone decoration of late Sasanian crowns was reportedly so weighty that it had to be supported with help from props or a suspension chain. Adding to the effect of such conspicuous display, the monarch's clothing likewise shone with jewels, golden thread, and pearls (Ṭabarī 2445–2448, 2454; Peck 1993; Canepa 2018, 332).

The natural surroundings of imperial architectural spaces were also essential to their holistic visual environments. Demonstrating the monarch's responsibility to care for the earth as set out in Sasanian cosmology, and co-opting a long-standing Iranian tradition as a marker of Sasanian imperial legitimacy, Sasanian palaces were intentionally designed to integrate natural features as well as ornamental and productive landscapes like hunting enclosures (Canepa 2018, 345–374).

Taq-e Bostan (fig. 10.3), site of three imperial rock reliefs, was part of an integrated royal complex containing an imperial pleasure garden, hunting enclosure, and water source (Canepa 2018, 360). The site introduced a new rock art configuration with reliefs carved into the walls of a barrel-vaulted space hollowed into living stone, a setting that explicitly recalls the appearance of a palace *ayvan*. Stone landings extended the floor level of these artificial grottos to project into the water before them (Callieri 2006, 341 and fig. 9; Canepa 2018, 360 n. 117). The presence of cuttings for door pivots has led Canepa to suggest that the largest and latest Taq-e Bostan grotto served as an outdoor audience hall used in conjunction with the adjacent royal hunting preserve (Canepa 2018, 362). The low-relief royal hunt motifs on the grotto's side walls would have been appropriate for such a space. Taken together with Ammianus Marcellinus's comment on painted imagery and the obscure written description of "statues" in

the Ṭāq-e Kesrā audience hall, there is likelihood that hunting imagery—suggesting as it did a link with the Iranian past and allegorical imperial dominance over competitors—was a popular and persistent choice for imperial reception spaces (Canepa 2009 157–161, 185, 306 n. 13; Canepa 2018, 345–374). Judging from remains of an artificial marsh for boar hunting, a proximate rock face prepared for an incomplete rock-cut *ayvan*, and four late Sasanian basket capitals representing the king and Anahita, a configuration similar to Taq-e Bostan may have been intended for nearby Bisotun (Salzmann 1976 110–134; Kleiss 1996; Luschey 2013; Canepa 2018, 362–365).

FIGURE 10.3. Rock-cut standing investiture scene at Taq-e Bostan I, late fourth century **AD.** Image courtesy of Mina Alipanah, CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.

Sacred Spaces

Archaeological evidence for the decoration of sacred spaces is stronger than that available for palaces. The Sasanians developed and spread the *chahar taq*, a new architectural format associated with sacred fire temples and featuring a centrally planned space crowned by a dome supported on squinches (Canepa 2018, 147, 271–294). Like palaces, major fire temples included an *ayvan* preceding the plan's centralized feature, but access between the *ayvan* and *chahar taq* was generally screened with an ambulatory corridor (Canepa 2018, 327). Hallways and courtyards usually surrounded this combination, and it is generally these subsidiary spaces

that preserve decoration. Religious complexes at Bīšāpūr (founded by Šāpur I), Kuh-e Khawaja (early and later Sasanian phases), Bandiyan (fifth century), and Taḵt-e Solaymān (sixth century) attest to the motifs and combination of media used to embellish sacred spaces (Kröger 1982, 141–147; 2005; Rahbar 2008; Mousavi and Darayee 2012, 1087–1088; Canepa 2018, 273–282).

A large complex at Bīšāpūr, once thought to be a palace, is now considered a sacred space built by Šāpur with the assistance of Roman captives after his third-century triumphs (Inscription of Šāpur at Kaaba i Zardušt (ŠKZ); Canepa 2009, 75–78; Huff 2012, 89–90; Canepa 2018, 257). Stuccoed niches with gilded swastika and acanthus patterns of Western influence and a rich but obscure stucco figural program were juxtaposed with stone-carved architectural elements reflecting Achaemenid traditions (Kröger 1982, 195–196; 2005; Huff 2012, 89; Canepa 2018, 257). Eighteen mosaic floor panels, featuring masks and heads, female dancers, musicians, and garland makers, provide some of the only evidence yet encountered for the incorporation of the mosaic medium in Sasanian sacred architecture. Adornment of floors with mosaic was a practice adapted from the West; floors finished in plaster or stone were more typical of Sasanian tradition (Huff 1986b; Keall 1989). Although the subject matter of the Bīšāpūr floors is often described as Dionysian, such motifs had circulated in western Asia since the Hellenistic period and need not necessarily be understood to reference Dionysus (Canepa 2009, 75–78). The decidedly non-Roman sinuous style of representing bodies in mosaic suggests intermingling between Roman captives and local artisans working in a Western medium at the site. However contemporaries understood the iconography, adornment of the space with decorations referencing the West was a calculated display of intellectual booty in the wake of Šāpur I's victories (Canepa 2009, 75–78).

Extensive remains at Kuh-e Khawaja in the eastern empire attest to three phases of intervention, with the second phase dating to the early Sasanian period (Canepa 2018, 273–281). While conventional motifs are attested in the early stucco, unique is the decoration from the north courtyard wall featuring faux-architectural details in stucco-covered brick and two life-sized figures, probably kings holding diadems, flanking the doorway leading toward the sanctuary. The figures were modeled in mud, covered with gypsum plaster, and likely painted (Canepa 2018, 276). Figural stucco decoration on the south façade of the site's fire temple featured a royal hunt with a male protagonist—perhaps a symbolic or mythic king—killing a feline in front of three mounted male onlookers. Radiocarbon-dated to the mid-sixth–mid seventh centuries ad, the evidence of Kuh-e Khawaja's later decorative phase suggests later sacred spaces continued to make use of both ornamental and figural stucco motifs and confirms that royal hunt imagery occurred in both religious and imperial spaces in the later Sasanian period (Kröger 1982, 141–147; Kröger 2005; Canepa 2018, 281).

Deriving mainly from its gates and hallways, Kuh-e Khawaja also provides substantive remains of painted decoration in a religious context. Canepa has recently argued that a procession in the "Painted Gallery" of the early Sasanian period integrates figures of the royal family, courtiers, and divinities with Bactrian attributes, and utilizes two variations of a Bactrian painting style. He takes this as evidence that the mural decoration was part of a larger ideological effort to integrate newly won Bactrian territory into the Sasanian Empire. The Painted Gallery's subsidiary decoration, with its ceiling and window recesses brimming with decorative detail, suggests Sasanian appreciation for a *horror vacui* aesthetic (Canepa 2018, 273–281). The domed interior of the complex's South Gate preserved a fragmentary painting of a nearly life-size king or noble from the early Sasanian era, and from a later phase of decoration, a dual-registered composition with unclear heroic or religious significance and a cityscape that served as the setting for a procession of two rows of figures, some of whom wear a ritual mouth and nose covering that signals a religious or imperial context (Canepa 201

8, 280). The imagery bears notable similarities to the eyewitness descriptions of the two-dimensional imagery in the Ṭāq-e Kesrā.

Large-Scale Sculpture

Large-scale sculpture of the Sasanian period, both relief and in the round, is almost all considered to be of imperial commission and usually located in proximity to ideologically significant sites. With his foundation of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardašīr I utilized rock relief with renewed vigor to bolster his legitimacy, thus establishing a trend that continued throughout the third and fourth centuries (Hermann and Curtis 2002; Canepa 2009, 53–75; 2018, 126–137, 252–270). Altogether, some thirty Sasanian rock reliefs are known, with most executed in the first eighty years of Sasanian rule and a limited return of the medium in the late Sasanian era (Hermann and Curtis 2002). Reliefs from the early centuries of Sasanian rule were sited primarily in Pars, the dynasty's heartland. Ardašīr I carved two reliefs in proximity to his two palaces, all located near his great circular city, Ardašīr-Xwarrah ("fortune of Ardašīr"; modern Firuzabad; Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 50–51; Canepa 2018, 126–128). He also commissioned reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam, burial place of Achaemenid kings, and a nearby grotto, Naqš-e Rajab, establishing these sites as precedents for his successors. In total, Naqš-e Rostam received eight reliefs in the third and fourth centuries, and Naqš-e Rostam received three from the reigns of Ardašīr I and Šāpur I (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 52–53, 55–57, 63, 71–72, 75–77; Canepa 2018, 251–270). Six reliefs were inscribed by Šāpur I and his successors in a gorge adjacent to Bīšāpūr (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 59–62, 69, 78; Canepa 2018, 128–132). Sasanian kings' artistic and architectural interventions in Pars should be understood as attempts to harness the ideological potential of a landscape connected with an illustrious Iranian heritage (Canepa 2018, 251–270).

Other sites attracted the interventions of only a single monarch. A relief depicting Ardašīr I and Šāpur I in northern Iran at Salmas and another depicting Šāpur I at Rag-e Bibi were likely attempts to visually mark conquered territories (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. no. 54; Canepa 2018, 135–136). Narseh's tower at Paikuli bearing the bilingual inscription that recounts his rise to power is a different type of monument, but it bore relief sculpture including busts of King Narseh and served a similar function by visually marking the area where his usurpation was legitimized (Canepa 2018, 266–267). Many other stand-alone reliefs are connected with the late third-century ruler Bahrām II. This king's reign saw several setbacks that increased imperial propaganda may have aimed to offset (Hermann and Curtis 2002), and some reliefs, including those at Guyum, Sarab-i Qandil, and Barm-e Delak, may be non-official commissions carried out by local high officials (De Waele 1978, 26; Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 65–68; Her rmann 2000, 42–43; Haerinck and Overlaet 2009, 535–536). The northeasternmost Sasanian relief, located at Rayy, was erased by a Qāǰār ruler (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. no. 86; Huff 1986 a; Mousavi and Darayee 2012, 1090).

By the early fourth century, the fashion for rock reliefs waned. This corresponds to an uptick in royal depictions in silver and stucco, suggesting a change in the preferred media for official art from this time (Hermann and Curtis 2002). Taq-e Bostan hosts the final three Sasanian rock reliefs, two from the later fourth century (Taq-e Bostan I and II) and one usually dated to the reign of Ḵosrow II (Taq-e Bostan III–VI). Marking a change from the standard western Asiatic practice of situating the relief on a prepared rock face, the Taq-e Bostan reliefs adorned artificial grottos cut from living rock (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 79–84; Hermann and Curtis 2002; Overlaet 2011; Compareti 2016; Canepa 2018, 360–361).

The most repeated rock relief themes, established in the reigns of Ardašīr I and Šāpur I, were battle scenes, divine investiture, celebrations of triumph, and the royal hunt. The earliest Sasanian rock-cut composition is located at Firuzabad and depicts Ardašīr's overthrow of the last Parthian ruler (fig 10.4; Vanden Berge 1983, cat. no. 50; von Gall 2008, 149). The relief features an equestrian dual, an iconography utilized since Parthian times where the representation of the adversary as equal adds to the prestige of the defeat (von Gall 1990; 2008, 149). Ardašīr's successors adapted this composition, but only one instance can be attributed confidently (Hermann and Howell 1977, 6–9; Herrmann and Curtis 2002; von Gall 2008, 149). Continued debate over precise chronology complicates the suggestion that there may have been a discernible shift from early variations on this theme featuring fleeing adversaries to a variant with confronted combatants (von Gall 2008, 149–150). However, the "flying gallop" was consistently incorporated.

FIGURE 10.4. Drawing by Eugene Flandin (1840) of a rock relief in Firuzabad (Pars, Iran) showing Ardašīr I's equestrian victory over Parthian king Artabanus. Public domain.

Precedent for divine investiture, with a divinity offering a diadem with streaming ribbons to the Sasanian monarch in both standing and equestrian configurations, was set by Ardašīr I (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 50–53; Canepa 2009, 38–39, 55–78). Third-century successors repeated both motifs, and the standing variation remained in use to the end of the Sasanian period (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 55, 59, 62, 75, 79–81; Movassat 2005, 21–61). Significantly, both royal and divine figures are visually presented as equals, signaling a departure from previous Iranian artistic tradition that either depicted royal investiture at the hands of a non-divinity or carefully distinguished iconographically between divine and royal participants (Canepa 2009, 55–68; Canepa 2018, 257–269). The equestrian variant of divine investiture was often conflated with triumphal imagery. Equestrian investiture scenes depicting Ardašīr I, Šāpur I, and Narseh (modified from a relief of Bahrām I) all integrate a defeated enemy under the hooves of the ruler's horse (Canepa 2009, 55–68; 2018, 259, 267). With their inclusion of an additional figure trampled by the divinity's mount, Ardašīr and Šāpur's versions of the motif imply analogy between the rulers' victories over terrestrial foes and the supreme Zoroastrian divinity Ohrmazd's conquest of his eternal nemesis, the demon Ahriman (Canepa 2009, 55–68). The late fourth-century Taq-e Bostan I relief is the sole version of a standing investiture scene to incorporate a defeated enemy, with the deceased body placed equally

under the feet of the king and the figure bestowing the diadem (fig. 10.3; Canepa 2009, 108–109).

Other compositions focused solely on the aftermath of a triumphant Sasanian victory, eschewing equestrian battle and divine investiture. Fitting this category are Ardašīr I's Salmas relief portraying the submission of two grandees, an early Sasanian relief at Darabgird, Šāpur I's Naqsh-e Rostam, Bīšāpūr II and III reliefs conflating a series of victories against Rome in various iterations, and the fourth-century Bīšāpūr VI relief featuring an enthroned king surrounded by courtiers and other attendants presenting prisoners and other offerings (Vanden Berge 1983, cat. nos. 54, 57–58, 60–61, 78; Hermann and Curtis 2002; Canepa 2009 55–68; 2018, 135, 425 n. 118). The strikingly frontal depiction of the king in Bīšāpūr VI was a compositional choice taken up infrequently in rock relief. However, it had been utilized in the medium since the reign of Bahrām II, was exploited by the Sasanians in other media, and had precedent in Parthian art (von Gall 2008, 15).

As early as Šāpur I's relief from Rag-e Bibi, rock-cut scenes featured the royal hunt (Grenet et al. 2007; Canepa 2009, 58, 157; 2018, 136). The relief depicting Bahrām II fighting lions at Sar Marshad and the extensive reliefs on the side walls of the late Sasanian artificial grotto at Taq-e Bostan belong to this tradition (Trümpelmann 1975, 3–11; Vanden Berge 1983, cat. no. 70, 83–84; Harper 1986; Movassat 2005, 86–105; Canepa 2009, 175–176).

While rock relief was the preferred format for large-scale sculpture, the Sasanians did produce sculpture in the round. Bīšāpūr contained a twin-column monument crowned by Corinthian capitals. According to the preserved inscription, an Iranian patron sponsored the display, which originally included an image of Šāpur I, presumably standing atop the column (Canepa 2009, 76; Huff 2012, 89; Darayee 2017). Also at Bīšāpūr, Šāpur I had a 6.70 m tall statue of himself carved from a stalagmite formed inside a cave sited high above the same gorge that contained his nearby rock reliefs (fig 10.5).

FIGURE 10.5. Statue of Shapur I, Bīšāpūr. Image courtesy of Speedwork at the Persian-language Wikipedia, GFDL, via Wikipedia Commons.

It is possible that the cave was originally crowned with a *korymbus* made of bronze and was placed in a shallow pool of water (Garosi 2012, 27, 35). The cave's walls show preparatory work that suggests reliefs were planned but never completed (Canepa 2018, 130). The function of the statue and its terraced cave is unknown, but scholars have hypothesized ties to funerary rites or ruler cult (Garosi 2012, 5, 35; Canepa 2018, 130). A damaged stone torso of a male figure carved in the round is recorded with other Sasanian archaeological material at Taq-e Bostan. However, it remains enigmatic due to its lack of context and poor state of preservation (Huff 1986a). Similarly tantalizing are remains inside a small single *ayvan* structure at the later Sasanian site Taq-e Girra. Similar in concept to Taq-e Bostan, its interior preserves four holes, along with a large block at the center of the rear wall that may have served as a supporting backdrop for a statue of the king (Callieri 2012, 158; Canepa 2018, 359).

Precious Materials, Seals, and Textiles

Unfortunately, the vast majority of artworks in these media come from uncontrolled environments and can add little certain information to a discussion of Sasanian art. Comments here are therefore limited to summary remarks providing further bibliography.

In the absence of archaeological evidence to ground the Sasanian attribution of silver vessels with splendid relief decoration, scholars have sought iconographic and formal parallels in other media. This imperfect methodology has resulted in the ascription of the same vessel to different chronologies or cultures but has also yielded important, relatively secure insights. Owing to the plentitude of comparanda in other media and kings' personal crowns, the most stable assertions pertain to silver plate produced for the court. In the third and early fourth centuries, nobles, princes, and kings were depicted on silver in portrait medallions and occasionally as hunters pursuing animals (fig. 10.5; Harper 1974; Harper and Meyers 1981, plate 8.12; Harper 1986). From the later fourth until the sixth centuries, it became the exclusive right of the king to be represented on silver. At the same time, the hunting motif became the king's preferred portrait format, and the imagery of royal plate became relatively stereotyped (Harper 1986).

The late fourth-century ascendancy of silver court plate conveniently corresponds with the decline of rock relief. Written sources suggest that the Sasanian court used silver for diplomatic gifts, which fits well with purported find-spots for many court plates outside of Sasanian territory (Harper 1983, 1116–1117; 1986; Canepa 2009, 156–158; Cutler 2009). A shift in propagandistic medium may signal a change from an internal to an extraterritorial audience. Royal plate's compact format and tactful, if allegorical, hunting subject matter could have been a boon in this regard (Harper 1983, 1117; Canepa 2009, 156–158). An enormous sardonyx cameo featuring Romano-Sasanian equestrian combat, and rock-crystal objects like the so-called Cup of Soloman depicting a frontal enthroned Sasanian king, may have also served as diplomatic gifts, but the biographies of these works can only be inferred (BnF inv. 379, CdM 1893; Canepa 2009, 69–71, 162–163). Court silver's iconographic consistency, scientifically confirmed restricted access to raw material, and Middle Persian inscriptions attesting to weight suggest rigid state control (Harper 1983, 1117, 1126; Harper 1986). Less reliable in attribution as Sasanian products are silver vases or ewers bearing dancing female figures, a few vessels with mythological subject matter derived from Graeco-Roman prototypes, and a small class of hemispherically shaped bowls (Harper 1983; 1986).

Research on silver has also yielded formal and technical observations. The development of court propaganda executed in silver, with gilding reserved for figural components or the background shell, fits with knowledge that Sasanian territory had no native source of gold and that the dynasty lacked regular gold coinage (Harper 1986). Relief vessels were produced with a technique adapted from Western sources: areas of highest relief were worked in repousse or carved on a separate piece of silver, then tucked under the lip of a background shell. Ewers, high-footed fluted bowl shapes, and niello are also signs of interconnection with the West (Harper 1983, 1114–1116, 1127–1128).

Reconsideration of the evidence for textiles has led to revision of long-held assumptions. The only Sasanian textile fragments recovered from excavations are late (sixth–seventh century ad) and come from the sites of Šahr-e Qumes and Tel-e Malyan. They lack decorative motifs, and whether they were imports or were manufactured in Persia is uncertain (Kawami 1992; Vogelsang-Eastwood 2006, 237–240; Compareti 2009). Representations of textiles on other art objects (especially the Taq-e Bostan hunting reliefs) and vague references to Sasanian textiles in foreign written sources have added little of certainty (Peck 1969, 121–123; Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001; Compareti 2009). Pearl-bordered roundel patterns were once thought to be characteristic of Sasanian textiles, but additional research has complicated this supposition. It is only certain that the Sasanians produced and utilized the pearl roundel pattern in stucco decoration, not textile (Bromberg 1983, 252; Taverna 1993, 213, 227; 2001, 218–219; Compareti 2009). Given relationships among Persian, Byzantine, Coptic, Sogdian, and early Islamic

arts, it is not yet possible to establish a repertoire of textiles that can be ascribed undoubtedly to the Sasanians (Compareti 2009).

As seals are generally small and carved from semi-precious stones, they have tended to be collected or traded as precious objects over generations. The Sasanians used stamp seals, usually of hemispherical shape in metal or stone with a perforation that allowed the object to be suspended from a length of metal or cord. Designs on seal faces, featuring either images or inscriptions in isolation or combined, are thought to be unique to individuals or offices and served as a means of official or personal confirmation (Huff 1986a; Gyselen 2007, 17–34).

Archaeologically Grounded Quotidian Art

Archaeological work that has begun to illuminate Sasanian quotidian art indicates regional differences (Mousavi and Darayee 2012, 1076). Regionalism, together with limited decorative elaboration, complicates the identification of Sasanian pottery. Reliable ceramic typologies for the empire's core are still lacking. However, recent work in the Merv Oasis has identified phases of development for that region's Sasanian ceramics (Puschnigg 2017), while excavation and survey results suggest considerable differences in wares from Mesopotamia, the Iranian Plateau, and north-eastern Iran. The simple character of decoration suggests ceramics were not a medium of particular prestige. Painted pottery was limited to the early period in southern and south-eastern Persia, a blue-green glazed ware turns up often in Mesopotamia but only infrequently in the Iranian Plateau, and wares with simple incised or combed decoration are attested from western and southern Persia (Huff 1986a; Boucharlat and Haerinck 1991; Mousavi and Darayee 2012, 1091–1092).

Bone-carved hairpins comparable to exempla from the Roman West occur in urban contexts across the Sasanian Empire and offer a glimpse of a cosmopolitan late antique fashion. A workshop for creating such objects is documented at Veh-Ardashir (Simpson 2013; 2014, 20).

Finally, scientific evidence suggests that a new glass industry launched in the Sasanian era. Zoroastrians considered glass to be ritually pure, and this may partially account for the medium's popularity (Kröger 2001). Excavations and surveys have shown lowland Mesopotamia and the southern Caucasus as likely production centers (Simpson 2015, 93–96). Thin-walled balsamaria are ubiquitous. Also attested are thick-walled hemispherically shaped bowls with wheel-cut facets on their exteriors. Exterior decoration with molded ribs or warts created with pinchers is typical on vessels of various shapes (Simpson 2015, 89). Beads, gambling pieces, and jewelry insets could be made of glass paste in multiple colors. There is also evidence that blown glass disks were produced for use in windows at Takt-e Solaymān (Harper 1986; Huff 1986a; 1995; Kröger 2001; Simpson 2003).

Lasting peace in former Sasanian territories, allowing for new archaeological work that can clarify assemblages, illuminate periods of construction and usage, and further elucidate non-imperial contexts remains the best hope for the future study of Sasanian art. With an eye to the future, readers are encouraged to keep abreast of the University of California, Irvine's *Sasanika*, a major online resource still in development at the time of writing.

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CHAPTER 11

THE VISUAL ARTS OF UMAYYAD SYRIA

NADIA ALI

Some Propositions

Early Islamic Art as a Category

Is the notion of "early Islamic art" more than a modern historiographic invention: the artificially imposed transitional stage between the broadly naturalistic art of Graeco-Roman antiquity and the more schematic art of medieval Islam? So necessary has this "middle man" seemed that rarely has the proposition of his non-existence been entertained. Yet, if one focuses within the relatively narrow temporal confines of—let us say—AD 661 to 800, the overwhelming impression is of great diversity of visual production encompassing a plurality of styles, kinds of subject matter, and visual media. The sculptures of mid-eighth-century Mshatta in Jordan, for instance, are remarkably classical. Take for instance, the more than life-size stone statue of a standing female entirely naked discovered in the throne room of this Umayyad palace (Talgam 2004). This accomplished sculptural image seems to look back—with some changes and differences—to a seamless continuity with the high imperial past in the East. In the same vein, the famous wall paintings of Qusayr ʿAmra, an Umayyad bathhouse built in the Balqa by the prince al-Walid II, contains a representation of a consular governor (Ali 2017). The image shows the governor in his mop hairstyle, official toga and bearing *mappa*. Images like this appear to look back at the consular diptychs in ivory produced in the eastern Mediterranean. By contrast, the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock (692) and the Great Mosque of Damascus (705–715) tell a radically different story. The iconographic programs and the wealth of mosaics and marbles appear to look back at the Byzantine tradition of church decoration (e.g., Saint George Rotunda, Thessaloniki), eschewing naturalistic space, avoiding individualism in the representation of architecture, and even rejecting a realism of relative dimensions so that the trees are larger than the architectural motifs in the mosaics of the Great Mosque. There are no figural images but rather groups of religious aniconic images in proto-medieval styles which have quite reasonably always been taken to look forward, away from classical preoccupations toward the Islamic Middle Ages.

However, two points need to be made in defense of the category of "early Islamic art." First, the diversity is not, in my judgement, any greater than that within Roman imperial art or Byzantine art. Under the Roman Principate, for instance, visual production of the center maintains a constant polarity or dualism between Hellenistic naturalism and an anti-naturalist tendency. And if one looks to Roman Syria or late antique Egypt, the range of styles is still more diverse. Moreover, one may ask whether this range is any greater in Umayyad art than it already was in late Roman art, which incorporated—alongside the Greek sculptural traditions inherited from the fifth century BC—numerous styles and themes encompassing Egypt, Syria, and the sphere of Persian/Parthian influence (e.g., Petra, Palmyra, Dura). In other words, not unlike Roman art, the visual arts of Umayyad Syria could be better described as "pluralistic" (Elsner 2006).

In effect, the range of early Islamic art is not in itself exceptional within late antiquity, but this does not necessarily imply that the category is less meaningful than any other imposed by scholarship. Second, if one takes the long view, looking at the dominant visual trends employed by Umayyad artists and patrons, then there is no doubt that between the seventh century ad and the ninth century there are fundamental changes that reflect the abandonment of naturalism as the key canon for how Islamic art should look, even if one accepts that various phases of classicizing "renaissance" kept emerging to resist the slide into abstraction. Qusayr ʿAmra's paintings and Mshatta's three-dimensional sculptures illustrate this kind of revival. It is this long view—admittedly one that is dependent both on stylistic analysis—that justifies the need for "early Islamic art" as something in between which might explain a cultural transformation between the kinds of representation favored by Graeco-Roman naturalism and the schematism of medieval Islam (given that all these definitions are generalizations).That does not mean the category would have been meaningful to people living at the time that this art was produced (but then neither would the concept of late antiquity). "Early Islamic art" (like "late antique art") exists entirely within the domain of scholarly explanation, teleologically linked to what succeeded it, namely, the breakdown of naturalistic forms in the various visual forms of the Middle Ages. It does not imply the concept to be any less valid for that, but we may as well be clear about what we mean by it.

Some Models of Analysis

The problem with the long view then becomes what vantage you choose to look from. Early Islamic art has for decades been plagued with two historiographies, effectively two methodologies for its study. They represent the view from Roman and Sasanian art history, looking forward into the confluence of the two traditions in Umayyad art; and the view from medieval Islam, looking backward into the origins of early Islamic image-making. In this regard, three interventions in the study of early Islamic art are crucial. Ernst Herzfeld's essay "The Genesis of Islamic Art" (1910), Louis Massignon's "Méthodes de réalisation des peuples mulsulmans" (1921), and later responses, especially that of Oleg Grabar (1955). The first model, formulated by Herzfeld was concerned with late Roman and Sasanian visual sources for early Islamic art and with the question of what makes it distinctive from its predecessors. Herzfeld saw the very combination of Western and Eastern motifs as a mark of a new identity. Massignon's response to Herzfeld's formalism was to reject the idea of external influence and to provide instead an overarching religious explanation for Islamic art. These two foundational essays generated later responses. Among the most influential is Grabar's dissertation on Umayyad art and ceremonial, in which he dismissed faith-based models and constructed an Umayyad visual culture as the pictorial chronicle of palatial life animated by a strong eastern element (Ali 2020).

Ultimately, Herzfeld and Grabar's model are indebted to two books published in 1901 which effectively fixed the field for the next decades: Alois Riegl's *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* and Josef Strzygowski's *Orient oder Rom*. Strzygowski in particular, whose later career is clouded with arguments for Aryanism, argued that the arts of the East took over the naturalism of the Graeco-Roman tradition (Elsner 2020). Even though Strzygowski's political agenda may have been rejected, the governing idea of a visual tradition outside the Mediterranean as a basis for the special nature of both early Christian and early Islamic art has remained very influential.

In addition to these models, one may ask to what extent Grabar's model can be connected to some form of Russian orientalism (different from Edward Said's orientalism) characterized as a discourse animating the Asian element of Russian identity (Elsner 2021)? How did Oleg Grabar's identity as a double exile-being the son of a White Russian Orthodox refugee from the

Revolution (André Grabar, the founder of Byzantine art history), raised in France, and pursuing his academic career as a European émigré in the United States-shape his perspectives on Umayyad art? As a native French speaker, Oleg Grabar had easy access to French academic circles. Fluent in Russian, he also connected effortlessly with Russian scholars (Hillenbrand 2012). His decision to focus on the Umayyad period for his PhD at Princeton (completed in 1954 but never published) set the course for his life-long interest for Umayyad art, from his seminal 1959 article on the Dome of the Rock to major works in the 1970s like *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973) and *City in the Desert* (1978). I will focus primarily on his earliest work—his PhD dissertation, *Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court*.

The main objective of his dissertation was to show "that the Umayyads had a fairly well developed royal ceremonial and iconography and that the influence of eastern models was much greater than has hitherto been believed." He thus postulated that the Umayyad ruler was "closer to the Shahanshah than to the basileus" (Grabar 1955) and described early Islamic art and Umayyad ceremonial as the confluence of an Oriental Hellenism and an Eastern-Sasanian model of sacred monarchy. The following quote illustrates these points:

> The figurative remains from the three palaces of Qusayr Amra (where the main hall only was examined), Khirbat al-Mafjar, and Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, although differing in style, show iconographic similarities. Their main theme is the king surrounded by musicians, dancers, athletes, and hunting scenes. Except for hunting, practically a universal expression of royal glory, these features can be traced to *an oriental tradition appearing not only in Persia but also in Central Asia and India*. The extent of eastern influences on the art and ceremonial of the Umayyads can be explained by the facts that the whole of Iran with its men and traditions was incorporated into the new empire; and that there was a definite movement of objects d'art *from east to west* (my emphasis). (Grabar 1955)

More fundamentally, Grabar also emphasized the need to distinguish between *prophetic* and *royal* authority in early Islam. His fix on the "royal dimension of Umayyad culture and art" combined with the relative absence of religion in his scholarship has led to an over-estimation of his commitments to secularism. However, with this distinction between royal and prophetic authority, Grabar developed the idea of an opposition between a Semitic/religious and eastern pre-Semitic agency, thus projecting onto early Islam some old and deep-seated assumptions about Christianity as a religion not so much heirs to Jewish models but rather as Eastern Aryan Christianity, a prominent theme in the works of several Russian historians such as Nikodim Kondakov (Lidova 2020) and Mikhail Rostovtzeff (Elsner 2021). In other words, Grabar used Islam and Umayyad art in Syria to deploy an argument in favor of a vital force and positive agency coming from the East. It is here that one might detect a filiation between Grabar's agenda and earlier Eurasianist works on ancient Syria and the holy East.

Several aspects of Grabar's model can be compared to the narratives of Rostovtzeff's story on Dura Europos (Elsner 2021) or on Graeco-Scythian art (Meyer 2013). In both Rostovtzeff's story on Dura in late ancient Syria and Grabar's analysis of the visual arts in Umayyad Syria, we are dealing with caravan cities, desert castles or "city in the desert" as Grabar used to call Qasr al-Hayr al- Sharqi (1978). In both cases, there is an emphasis on the central role of Iranian and Greek cultures in the formation of late ancient art and early Islamic art in Syria. In both cases, the visual arts are situated within a broader Eurasian context at the expense of local models (Sasanian and central Asian in Grabar). In both cases, there is a drive not only to locate further east the origins of either Christian art (Rostovtzeff) or Islamic art (Grabar), but also to highlight a movement of forms, objects, and ideas not from the west to the east, but from the east to the west. Caspar Meyer and Jas Elsner convincingly argued that Rostovtzeff used archaeology and art history to construct a set of Graeco-Iranian origins for Russia and Orthodox Christianity that was "free from the West." Elsner observes:

> The deep Eurasian fantasy of late imperial Orientalism in Russia—not to be confused with Edward Said's model of Orientalism—an Orientalism that was fundamentally a romantic and spiritual drive to animate the Asian element of Russian identity. The key elements in this heady ideological mix that emerge in Rostovtzeff are: sacrality and religion (the deep ancestor of Russian orthodoxy); monarchy (the deep ancestor of the Tsarist system); and an Eastern, and not Mediterranean origin founded in the interface of Iranians and Greeks that is a set of Russian origins free of the West. (Elsner 2021, 772)

The shift in focus from the West to the East as the core origin of civilization originates with Rostovtzeff's teachers, Nikodim Kondakoff (1844-1925) and Dimitri Ainalov (1862-1939), who developed an Eastern model for the origins of Byzantium (Lidova 2020). This model was later expanded by André Grabar (Oleg's father) in his work on the beginnings of Christian art, emphasizing Christian spiritual renewal in the East. As Elsner and Lidova have argued, this Eastern model is rooted in a Romantic Russian narrative that envisions renewal from the East and the rise of imperial Constantinople as the Christian Second Rome—the predecessor to Moscow as the Third Rome (Elsner 2020, Lidova 2020). In the same expansionist move, Oleg Grabar extends the Eurasianist model by incorporating early Islamic art and civilization (though stripped of its core element: religion-a move that can be interpreted as a reaction to his father Andre Grabar's imperial Byzantinism), by reimagining the caliph as a Persian king, and by tracing the origins of Umayyad art in Syria further east, making questionable comparisons with the arts of Begram, Olbia, Kuh-e-Kwaja, Bamyan, Kara-Shahr and Ajanta. Ultimately, Grabar transposed the fantasies of Russian orientalism onto small Umayyad sites in Syria, projecting narratives of a pre-Revolution past made nostalgic by double exile from Russia, closer to the intersection of Hellenism and Persia. Grabar insisted that "while many details and techniques [read: body] in Umayyad art were Byzantine or Roman, the basic *attitude* [read: soul, spirit, meaning, novelty] was always Eastern" (Grabar 1955). Ancestralist ideology was projected onto a space and art with no connection to Russia, creating a fantasy about worlds that never existed. Although Grabar did not experience the trauma of the first generation of White Russian refugees and wrote in a context where Eurasianism was no longer relevant, the relationship of Grabar's model to earlier Russian studies of the arts of Syria has never been fully explored. Whatever one's views on how Umayyad art should be theorized today, this question is historiographically significant and deserves further analysis. The need to know more about the critical axioms and presuppositions of our ancient historical and archaeological fathers is essential, well beyond the archaeology of early Islamic art.

Some Archaeological Facts

Let us move from this historiographical perspective to some archaeological facts about the question of change and continuity in the transition from late antique to early Islamic visual cultures, which may (or may not) help define the object-base of "early Islamic art."

Continuity and Change

The regional diversity of Syrian material culture is now well documented and is usually attributed to the landscape diversity and resources (Walker 2020). Classical and late antique towns with early Islamic occupation (Beth-Shean, Pella, Abila, Tiberias, Jerash) have been excavated since 1970s. While the archaeological study of early Islam in Syria has long been devoted to city planning, palace architecture, and monumental decoration, archaeological fieldwork since the 1990s has shifted to other rural sites (Geyer 2000) and the later occupation of Syria by the Abbasids (Humayma). Excavations of Decapolis (Jerash, Caesarea) and late

antique cities such as Umm al-Jimal, Madaba, and Jaffa are documenting continuity of urban life well after the Islamic conquests. Ongoing excavations in the Negev, Tiberias, and Ramla provide new insights on everyday life. All in all, these studies suggest that change in material culture was very slow and did not necessarily coincide with political history. For instance, we know now that very little changed in urban planning with the advent of Muslim rule in Syria (Walmsley 2012; Avni 2014). The recent excavations of Jerash (Jordan) and Tiberias (Israel) confirmed this assessment. For instance, at Tiberias a small eighth-century reproduction of the Great Mosque of Damascus was discovered only two meters from a five-aisled basilica that continued to be used for Christian worship until the late tenth century (Cytryn-Silverman 2009). Not only did the Muslim city planners preserve the Byzantine grid of the city, placing the congregational mosque at the city center, but Muslims and Christians continued to worship in the same neighborhood for more than two hundred years (for other examples, see Guidetti 2017; Tannous 2018). The same was true of Jerash in Jordan. There, the Danish-Jordanian Islamic Jerash Project (Simpson 2008; Walmsley et al. 2008; Walmsley 2012) and the Danish-German Jerash Project (Lichtenberger and Raja 2016) have identified evolutions of settlement, mercantile, and industrial activities that can be compared to those of Tiberias.

Religion

Little is known about the earliest phases of urban mosques that are still in use because reconstructions make it difficult to define previous stages. This is the case, for example, with the so-called Umayyad mosques of Aleppo, Hama, or Harran (Creswell and Allan 1989). Small mosques associated with the Umayyad princely residences are better known. Several Umayyad congregational mosques have been excavated at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi (Grabar et al. 1978), Rusafa (Sack 1996), Anjar (Finster 2003), and Palmyra (Genequand 2012). They all have a hypostyle prayer hall with three aisles and a courtyard with porticoes. At Rusafa, which was one of the capitals of the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik (724–743), the Umayyad Mosque was installed just next to the great basilica, pointing to the coexistence of Christian and Muslim communities.

Yet, to get a sense of Umayyad official art in a religious context, we must turn our gaze to Jerusalem and Damascus. The Dome of the Rock, built under the patronage of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705), is Islam's first major monument. It is commonly said that the rock was chosen as a holy site because of its association with Muhammad's night journey (his miraculous flight from Mecca to Jerusalem, and his ascension to heaven). One of the mosaic inscriptions bears the date ah 72 (ad 691–692), though it is unclear whether this date refers to the beginning or the completion of the construction. Morphologically, the Dome is an octagon crowned by a dome and its interior is centered around the bare black rock very much like the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Flood 2012). Many have speculated about the original function of the Dome of the Rock and about ʿAbd al-Malik's motivations in having it built. Marcus Milwright (2016) recently shed light on these issues by focusing on the circling Arabic inscriptions in mosaic placed high over the ambulatory on both the inner and outer sides. The two most significant points made by Milwright concern the mosaics' technical aspects and their interpretation. Milwright carefully places them in the continuity of earlier mosaic inscriptions in the region, principally in Greek (but also in Latin and Aramaic). The inscriptions show three distinct styles. While earlier scholars had attributed this diversity of styles to several teams of mosaicists working independently of each other, Milwright postulates that this is the result of innovation and evolution of technique. More crucially, he argues that the formal inconsistencies of the inscription on the south face of the outer ambulatory was produced by mosaicists, who probably had previously composed Greek inscriptions and were working left to right: working in

an unfamiliar script. In terms of content, the use of the Dome of the Rock's inner inscriptions as affirmation of God's unity (sura 112), Muhammad's prophecy, and anti-Christian stance have been abundantly commented. But Milwright also sees here the affirmation that Islam "represents the proper preparation for the end of days" (Milwright 2016, 241), suggesting an apocalyptic significance for the monument. It is particularly relevant in the context of Muslim–Christian relations as we know that in the writings of Christian authors the construction of the Dome of the Rock was set into an apocalyptic scenario of the last days.

The dialogic dimension of Umayyad art is also illustrated by the evolution of coin imagery. Quran 112 was also chosen to appear on a new epigraphic introduced by Abd al-Malik at the end of the 690s after a series of iconographical experiments between 692 and 697 inspired by Byzantine prototypes. In this experimental phase, the cross-on-steps depicted on the obverse of earlier Byzantine issues was modified by the removal of its crossbar. On other Umayyad coins in gold, silver, and copper produced from 693–694, the image of a standing figure (the Prophet or the caliph?) was used as a response to the introduction of a bust of Christ on Byzantine coins produced under Justinian Il (r. 685–671) (Heidemann 2010; Flood 2012).

The Great Mosque of Damascus, built under al-Walid (705–715) is another example of the intercultural dimension of Umayyad art. While Flood (2001) highlighted parallels with the East Roman emperor's palace in Constantinople, George's analysis (2021) takes his cue instead from Arabic poetic descriptions of the destruction of the church by al-Walid I (Jarir, Farazdaq, and al-Nabigha) and the Qur'anic foundation inscription on the qibla wall. George convincingly shows al-Walid's strategic maneuver with the emperor Justinian II and his success in forcing the Christian ruler to contribute to the construction of a mosque. George's examination of the Aphrodito papyri's evidence suggests that nearly all the artisans who worked on the mosque were Christians. He also recontextualized the use of spolia in Umayyad art by reminding us of an excavation of the Damascus Great Mosque's courtyard in 1962–1963 that revealed foundations of the massive temple of Zeus/Jupiter/Hadad, and patches of mosaic floor probably from the church that was eventually intruded into its temenos. From the diameter of a huge, fluted column fragment that had fallen from a great height, it is deduced that the temple rivaled those at Baalbek, Palmyra, and Jerash. Among other aspects of continuity was the huge consumption of olive oil by the mosque's lighting system. To appreciate the balance struck at Damascus between imperial display and imperial piety, comparison with other Umayyad projects can help. Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, for example, both in its provocative setting atop the Jewish Temple and in its own mainly Qur'anic foundation inscription, is even more triumphalist and explicit in its theological polemic against Trinitarianism. But the best hint at the mosque's intention was the lost foundation inscription preserved by the twelfth-century Damascene Ibn 'Asakir. The Qur'anic texts deployed in al-Walid's inscription focus on praising Allah and fit well with George's interpretation of the mosque's wall mosaics as not only evoking paradise but also eschatological themes and political claims to universal power. Besides this much needed polysemic approach, George's most innovative move is when he defines the Great Mosque as a shrine for the large and lavish codices displayed within it, turning the mosque into a gigantic container of God's word and visions of other worlds.

The detailed re-evaluation of Umayyad-era Quran manuscripts (Déroche 2014) is among the most impressive development in the study of Umayyad art. Déroche documents changes in the appearance of Qurans that suggest the great extent to which the appearance and role of copies changed over the Umayyad period. For the famous palimpsest from Sanaa, Déroche shows that the presence of sura (chapter) titles and decorative devices between the suras suggest that the text originates *not* with a Companion of the Prophet but during the second half of the seventh century. Déroche also analyzes fragments from codices from Damascus and Fustat whose most distinctive feature is illuminated framed and unframed sura headbands in spaces left by

copyists, relying on the geometric and vegetal shapes of late antique and Umayyad ornaments. Of equal interest is Déroche's analysis of the architectural elements, including columns, in the decorative repertoire of sura illuminations that can be traced back to earlier architectural decoration in the Byzantine and Ethiopian Gospels (with Flood 2012; George 2021).

Both the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Umayyad Qurans still have many secrets to yield and there is no doubt that the exploration of the Treasury "geniza" now scattered between Damascus and Istanbul and replete with documents of all three Abrahamic traditions will bring new perspectives (D'Ottone Rambach, Hirschler, and Vollandt 2020).

New Perspectives on the Early Islamic "Desert Castles"

It is becoming clear that the so-called Umayyad desert castles are neither castles nor built in the desert. The term is a generic name given to a series of thirty-eight aristocratic residences and complexes built in the eighth century by the caliphs and the new Muslim elites, mostly in the semi-arid regions of northeast Jordan at the border between cultivable land and the eastern steppe, in Israel and in northeastern Syria. It has been argued that several—located on hilltops, on lake shores, and close to wadis—may have been positioned for their spectacular views of the landscape while others situated on ancient trade routes had more economic functions. The function of these structures is still debated, but current excavations, which aim at revisiting the chronology of the earlier explorations in the nineteenth century, are providing a more complex picture of why they were built and how they changed over time. For instance, at Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, one of the largest Umayyad aristocratic settlements of the Syrian steppe that was founded as a madina by the caliph Hisham b. ʿAbd al-Malik in 728, extensive fieldwork conducted there between 2002 and 2011 shed new light on the multiple components of the site (palace, mosque, bath, housing), hydro-agricultural features and water systems (dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, qanats), structures with an economic role (watermills, warehouses, stables, and oil presses), and on vernacular structures around the caliphal palace. For Genequand, the desert castles were primarily elite residences built in places where they were allotted land grants. They were purposively developed as diplomatic settings and agricultural estates in order to diversify economically beyond tax revenues (Genequand 2012). The Palestinian-American excavations at Khirbat al-Mafjar have suggested a similar explanation. (Whitcomb 2013).

Some of these aristocratic establishments were lavishly decorated. At Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, the excavation of another aristocratic residence called Building E revealed a large quantity of stucco decorations, mostly rectangular panels bearing geometrical, vegetal, or figurative motifs showing strong Sasanian influences and reflecting "a princely iconography." At Khirbat al-Mafjar, Tawfiq Da'adli recently provided a reconstruction of the wall paintings of the upper floor of the audience hall including a "triumphal scene" showing soldiers on a blue background, various buildings, and imitation marble (Da'adli 2019).

Earlier explorations of the Umayyad residences were based mainly on the architectural remains and the monumental decoration. No attention has been paid to the finds of the excavations, so we know very little about the culture of objects in this palatial context (Rousset 2020). Studies of artifacts, such as glass finds (Dussart 2017), are still rare. And the excavations at Umayyad residences have hardly provided information about the ceramics of early Islam in Syria. But we have a better knowledge of pre- and early Islamic pottery. The material shows both continuity with Roman and Byzantine ceramics but also the appearance of new forms in the Umayyad period, such as certain types of amphorae or cooking vessels (Vokaer 2011).

While most of the metalwork dating to the early Islamic period has been acquired through the art market, notable and rare examples with archaeological context shed light on function. Fragments of a brazier from al-Fudayn (an Umayyad site in Jordan) feature Dionysiac imagery with women and satyrs. Such a large piece of bronze metalwork undoubtedly served as a luxury object in a courtly setting. Similarly, an incense burner discovered in palatial structures at Umm al-Walid, Jordan, points to the use of incense in court ceremonies. A promising archaeology of smell in religious and private contexts is now under way (Bursi 2020).

Finally, it is unfortunate that the use of early Islamic textiles in Umayyad architecture is so poorly documented. No textiles have been found in situ and the Umayyad buildings have not been mined for hooks, nods that would help in understanding the use of textiles in Umayyad architecture (Dospěl Williams 2019). However, the Abbasid chronicles and some Umayyad wall paintings depicting figures in heavily draped spaces suggest that the Umayyad interiors were richly curtained and that complex rituals of concealing and revealing were used to control access to privileged areas in Umayyad ceremonies and spectacles.

Notes on the Gaze in an Umayyad Pictorial Closet

The last section of this essay reflects on the gaze in the visual arts of Umayyad Syria, using Qusayr ʻAmra as the main case study. My first objective is to show how some of Umayyad paintings' most powerful philosophical contributions were made by confronting the very boundaries between what was publicly presentable and what needed concealment. My second objective is to suggest that problematic of the gaze is good to think with in our attempt to contextualize the Islamic unease about images.

The Site

The eighth-century bathhouse of Qusayr ʻAmra is one of the best-known Umayyad sites, due to its rich and complex painted surfaces and to its patron, Prince al-Walid ibn Yazid, later Caliph al-Walid II (r. 743–744). The building consists of a triple-aisled audience hall with an apodyterium, tepidarium, and caldarium attached. Like other Umayyad residences, Qusayr ʻAmra played a diplomatic role as the impressive settings where caliphs or princes met tribal leaders. To create relationships between the caliphal power and the local elites, the Umayyads often used a politic of personal contact and kinship, persuasion, cajoling, and gifting the Syrian tribal notables upon whom Umayyad power relied (Borrut 2010).

The walls and vaults of the audience hall and the bathhouse are covered with paintings, with subjects including local festivals of water, theatrical scenes, bathing, possible images of the patron, mythological figures such as Dionysus, and a range of female personifications of the Seasons, Gaia, Nereids. In the last decade, a team of Italian conservators has removed a layer of 1970s varnish and over-painting, revealing the original high-quality work. Thanks to their efforts, entire previously unknown scenes have been uncovered, and the bright colors (blue, purple, pink) and fine details of the paintings are being restored, bringing back to life one of the finest examples of late antique or early medieval painting to be found anywhere across the Mediterranean. Indeed, the restoration added a new wealth of details such as the Arabic inscription above the window asking "God to make al-Walid b. Yazid virtuous" (Imbert 2015), new details to familiar scenes, and completely new scenes, including illustrations of scriptural narratives such as those from the life of Jonah and a depiction of Andromeda and Perseus in the west aisle.

The So-called Bathing Lady

The famous painting of the "bathing lady" is in the center of the reception hall's west aisle (fig. 11.1) flanked by the panel of "the six kings" and the acrobats scene.

FIGURE 11.1. The so-called bathing lady, wall painting in the west aisle of Qusayr 'Amra's reception hall, Jordan, eighth century. Photo by Nadia Ali.

It shows a tall woman, almost entirely naked, standing in a bathing pool amid an impressive architectural setting. She is shown pulling a reddish curtain that hangs behind her. As one enters the building, the "bathing lady" is one of the most visible scenes in the hall. One framing strategy used here to enhance the lady's special character is the elaboration of the architectural setting showing a high colonnade joined by three round arches. Between the two columns that support the left-hand arch extends a lower and more closely spaced colonnade supporting a gallery with a parapet. The structure has been compared either to Hagia Eirene in Constantinople or the centrally planned byzantine church of St. Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople (Fowden 2004). Rather than identifying a specific building, we may have here a generic interior with all the elements traditionally associated with the representation of sacred space: intercolumniations, curtains, hanging lamps, and division of the audience by gender (e.g., Pola casket).

From the gallery in the painting, a crowd of onlookers, all male, looks through the high colonnade into the central space and watches the bathing lady. That kind of crowd scene with figures receding four-deep into the arcades recalls the late antique ivories such as the fifth-century ivory depicting a procession carrying relics, now in the Cathedral Treasury at Trier. The arch to the right of the composition is narrower and rests on the carved lintel of a doorway

closed by a white curtain. Above the lintel can be seen the head of a woman. Another attendant on platform shoes stands next to the pool and gestures toward the bather.

Our lady's posture, nudity, silk covering genitals, gesture, and rich adornment suggest that she is a version of Aphrodite. Additionally, some aspects of the gesture with the index and small finger extended, the adornment, and the direct address of the bathing lady's gaze can be traced back to Palmyra's statuary, the Fayyum funerary portraits, or the Dura relief showing Atargatis, while her frontal nudity can be traced back to the third-century wall painting of the synagogue of Dura Europos showing Moses taken from the river.

Much has been written on the possible identity of this more than life-size depiction of Aphrodite. We do not know how this great sculptural nude was displayed exactly, whether it was visible or only visible at certain moments and for certain guests. We do not know whether its subject was an Aphrodite (as a goddess) or some actual woman. We do not know whether the painting represented an actress incarnating a statue of Aphrodite coming to life or an actress impersonating Aphrodite in a post-classical burlesque (an aquatic performance or theatrical show) related to the local festivals of water *Maioumas* (for which we have archaeological remains in Jerash). We do not know whether her gesture is a version of the *pudica* self-covering inherited from antiquity or an act of striptease. And we do not know whether it was a marriage picture designed to enhance the fertility of al-Walid II, or more simply a sexual invitation particularly appropriate for the decoration of a bath house (e.g., Clement of Alexandria).

But clearly our Umayyad picture thematizes the issue of concealment and revelation—from the hand and blue silk that covers her genitals; the central reddish curtain drawn back at the upper left; to the other heavy curtain, this time white and closed with another woman whose body is hidden; and the acolyte in the background who seems to both point and show the lady while keeping his arm covered by a very ample textile. This range of concealments here play against the direct address of the bathing lady's gaze.

Sacred and Sexual Modes of Viewing

Building on Elsner's model for the analysis of the gaze in ancient and modern painting (Elsner 2004; 2007; 2015), I will start by using Freud's model of the obscene joke. For Freud captures the profoundly gendered *structure* that triangulates a speaker (classically male) who directs smut about a second person (female) to a third person (again male):

> Generally speaking, a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the one who makes the joke, there must be a second who is taken as the object of hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled…. Through the first person's smutty speech, the woman is exposed before the third, who, as listener, has now been bribed by the effortless satisfaction of his own libido. (Freud 1991, 143–144)

In the case of the unveiling of our Umayyad figure, the process of triangulation has moved beyond speech to sight, a topic on which Freud is clear in this section of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*:

> It cannot be doubted that the desire to see what is sexual is the original motive of smut…. A desire to see the organs peculiar to each sex is one of the original components of our libido. It may itself be a substitute for something earlier and go back to a hypothetical primary desire to touch the sexual parts. As so often, looking has replaced touching. (Freud 1991, 141)

Clearly the owner—al-Walid II or his *hajib*, the person who monitored access to the caliph and pulls aside the curtain or unlocks the *qasr*/chateau—is Freud's first person, while the

privileged viewer (al-Walid's guest or client), granted "the effortless satisfaction of his libido" through sight rather than speech, is the third. The image itself is the effaced female. At the same time in their alliance against the woman, the object of their desire, the men find common cause:

> The obscene joke turns the third person who originally interfered with the sexual situation into an ally, before whom the woman must feel shame, by bribing him with the gift of its yield of pleasure. (Freud 1991, 183)

It is here that one can get a sense of how the Umayyad elites used images to bribe their tribal guests and create solid bonds with them. Indeed, it is this process of revelation, as a social structure of visual experience and a technology of display, that is fundamental to our Umayyad painting. The painting is clearly a dialogue of ownership and male solidarity at the expense of the naked lady which forms the "intimidating" bond, the "bribe" and the "yield of pleasure" created in the picture's ritual of concealment and ostentation. Whatever cover scholarly fancy-dress and historical anecdotes may offer to the subject of this painting, what it shows is one man unveiling and presenting a naked woman for the delectation of another outside the image (the client) and the delectation of a crowd of male viewers depicted within the image.

But simultaneously our image is a very learned picture. The painting clearly hugs the contours of ancient images of Aphrodite with its sculptural dimension, jewelry, and posture. At the same time the painting's theatrical dimension echoes the literary descriptions of actress-prostitute displayed on the Roman public stage and often miming naked Aphrodite in a way that shows a statue coming to life (Lucian, John Chrysostom).

The apparent public nature of our image—not only in its form of theatrical display staged like a public spectacle but in its painted space of a potentially identifiable woman with admirers/haters, naked and open for service, clearly a prostitute, at best an actress-prostitute—is fundamentally and constitutively reversed by the fact *she looks back at us*—the viewers outside the image, thus turning a public show into an intense and anonymous primacy of the viewer and his *image*, the viewer to whom the lady is revealed in its frontal reality in a pseudo-religious ritual of discrete ostentation (or a parody of it). What is interesting with our picture is that where the Roman theatrical shows were made for the extreme conditions of display in the context of the Roman culture of spectacles, our Umayyad image is turned into a very private affair aimed at the external viewer's libidinal satisfaction. There is a clear shift from Roman civic liturgies to a private form of munificence.

The differences between the two kinds of display, one made for public exposure and the other for private revelation in conditions of privileged secrecy—and the fundamental difference between the image as veiled object of private display and the image as outed in the scholarship (and in the context of the modern site turned into a touristic venue)—is caught in the attempt to subject our Umayyad painting to a Lacanian model of visuality. In the autobiographical story of Lacan's *Séminaire* XI, the sardine can—floating in the water and glinting in the sunlight—is pointed out to Lacan by a third person who says "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" And yet what is disturbing to Lacan is that the can in a sense was looking at him all the same (Lacan 1977). This story describes a type of public viewing, where the spectator is observed in his or her act of looking and cannot control its conditions (Elsner 2015).

Particularly relevant to Lacan's model and the direct gaze of our Umayyad image is the Syrian-born Lucian's description in his pilgrimage narrative *De Dea Syria* of the statue of the goddess Hera/Atargatis. In Lucian's text, Atargatis's power is marked out by her precious adornments and her gaze: "There is another wondrous feature in the statue. If you stand

opposite and look directly at it, it looks back at you and as you move its glance follows. If someone else looks at it from another side, it does the same things for him" (Lucian., *Syr. D.* section 32, quoted in Elsner 2007).

In addition to her direct (almost sacred) gaze, our Umayyad lady is also characterized by the provocative position of her hand and what seems to be a protective horn gesture that holds the silk covering her nudity and points to the unseen genitals. The gesture "traps" the spot where the networks of vision, desire, and occlusion cross in the form of a talismanic screen. For it is the hand and everything that the hand (and the silk) may be imagined to mask and protect that most insistently look back at the viewer—gendering him not only as aggressively male with a penetrating gaze (a client with one thing on his mind) but also as a punter being watched by everyone else in the real space of the Umayyad hall as he makes his way in what ought to be the secrecy of shame to the sexual transaction our lady promises. In other words, the gaze of our Umayyad figure performs the aggression of the Lacanian gaze still more forcefully, especially in the presence of other guests who catch you looking at it.

Whatever historical or mythological subject one might propose as a fig leaf to protect the Umayyads' decency, this image's sexual intensity is hardly in question. The pose is explicitly indebted to ancient nudes of Aphrodite, and a direct gaze indebted to the sacred tradition of direct viewing as described by the Syrian-born Lucian only makes the eroticism of our image more targeted, but hardly less disturbing. Much is fundamentally different between the classical nude and our image. Arguably, the transgression of this painting is not just its frontal nudity but that it triangulates (as other ancient mythological and naturalistic nudes *do not*) the directly addressed viewer, the lady, and the crowd of onlookers. The spectator, caught at the point of being voyeur of a strange kind of theater, is entangled in a web of inclusion where the lady veers between internal viewers and external viewer, now turned into potential love-object by the animated image who "looks back." The viewer becomes an image. Additionally, the figure behind the lady on the right—wearing a robe and platform shoes characteristic of ancient depictions of actors—has no part in the precursor images. He raises the purple robe in a gesture that has hints of revelatory ostentatio and looks out to the viewer to mark the specific nature of his framing of the lady as a special kind of theater done for the viewer's own eyes.

This Umayyad nude is much more than a challenge to sexual decency; it assaults the entire visuality of seduction and it questions the desire that underlies the figural and naturalistic idiom of classical and post-classical art that the Umayyad have inherited. The Umayyad-triangulated image—where the painted woman is caught between viewer and bestial crowd—goes beyond either the Freudian or the Lacanian models of viewing. In our Umayyad image, the object that looks back—the desirable lady—comes to govern both the bestial crowd and the viewer as objects of her own desire and play. Is the horn gesture used by the lady some sort of apotropaic device to ward off the evil eye? Or is it the sign of cuckoldry—both ours and the crowd's? Does the lady look at me or at one of the other people in the room, seducing me at the same moment with her potent glance? It is useful to note that the spectators within the images are shown not only looking at the show but also as observing and gesticulating at each other's. One spectator in the front row seems to put his hands on his eyes as if he were protecting himself from an "optic intoxication" while others appear to respond to the lady by a horn gesture as if she were a demonic idol (fig. 11.2).

FIGURE 11.2. Detail showing the crowd of spectators in the "bathing lady" scene, wall painting in the west aisle of Qusayr ʿAmra's reception hall, Jordan, eighth century. Photo by Nadia Ali.

Our analysis suggests that this image was constitutively not intended for the role of challenging the public's gaze and was instead a picture for al-Walid's closet. This kind of image provides a precious visual context for the anti-image literature that developed in the hadiths, the large collection of legal tradition produced—like our image—in the middle of the eighth century. Two points need to be stressed. First, most of these hadiths worry about the use of figural images in *private* settings. Second, they also worry about the risk of animation (and idolatry) as illustrated by the tales of the Prophet Muhammad's treatment of the idols of Mecca, "which he first *blinded* with an arrow and then destroyed" (Flood 2019).

The artist who brought a recognizably sculptural sexual image here almost face to face with viewers of an almost intense piety is very likely the same artist who painted the religious images of Jonah in the lunettes that frame the program in the west aisle. In the northern lunette (fig. 11.3), the prophet is depicted emerging from the mouth of the sea monster and praying in the direction of a magnificently absent center—here a window.

FIGURE 11.3. Jonah cast out of the whale, wall painting in the lunette of the west aisle of Qusayr ʻAmra's reception hall, Jordan, eighth century. Photo by Nadia Ali.

While the principal figure in the nude challenges the viewer directly with her gaze, the gaze of Jonah is directed toward the invisible God, marking a fundamental difference between the protagonists of the two paintings and between two types of viewing: the physical, sensual, and adulterous being contrasted with a spiritual, insightful, and ascetic kind of vision.

Clearly, al-Walid II's test of the limits of sexuality in the representation of our lady is set against an overt representation of a religious "reality" (Jonah). The commentary this coupling provides is edgy and awkward. For it is not at all clear from the paintings themselves whether the pairing of the two pictures offers an Umayyad reactionary sermon, a blasphemous assault on religious realities, and/or a scandalous equation of realities: sacred and sexual, pious and illicit, religious "reality" and histrionic play. Is it too much to think that, in the privacy of the closet and in the closet's special arena of sexuality as opposed to religion, al-Walid II chose to confront pictorially the instabilities and problematics of images as visual instantiation of the desires of both flesh and spirit? At the very least, the two sets of themes—the problem of making religious reality visible and an intense interrogation of sexuality in the field of vision—go hand in hand and at the same moment at Qusayr ʻAmra.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

CHAPTER 12

HELLENISTIC RULE AND ROMAN OPERATIONS IN BABYLONIA AND ASSYRIA

JOHN MACGINNIS

The overthrow of the Achaemenid empire ushered in one of the most fascinating, if complex, periods in Mesopotamian history. While the events of the reign of Alexander are covered by the Alexander historians, the situation for the Seleucid period is much more difficult. The mainstream narrative of the political and military history again comes from classical writers, but these sources are scattered and very variable in terms of quality and coverage; they also suffer from not being contemporary accounts. No single source gives a reliable coverage of the period as a whole. Narrative accounts preserved in the works of Justin and Appian are supplemented by passages in Diodorus Siculus, Livy, Pausanias, Pliny, Plutarch, Polybius, Strabo, Josephus, Eusebius, and others (Cameron 2019). For modern sources on Seleucid history in Mesopotamia, see Walbank 1993, 13–28; Austin 2003, 133; Shipley 2000, 271–272; specific to Mesopotamia, Joannès 2000, 226–233; Boiy 2004; 8–54, van der Spek 2010, 369–370, Clancier 2011; Hauben and Meeus 2014; Kosmin 2014a: 7–12; 2014b; note also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993 and Overtoom 2020. The evidence of the classical authors is supplemented by indigenous sources, at least for the south of Mesopotamia. Particularly important is the evidence coming from cuneiform texts turned up by (licit and illicit) excavations in Babylonia over a period of now more than two hundred years. The cuneiform sources fall into a wide variety of categories: chronicles, administrative documents, letters, contracts, rituals, prayers, literary texts, mathematical texts, astronomical diaries, horoscopes, medical texts, and lexical lists; there is also one royal inscription, a cylinder of Antiochus I from Borsippa. The chronicles are of exceptional importance. Fragments of at least twenty chronicles of this period have been identified, recording events from the time of Alexander, the Diadochoi, and numerous of the Seleucid kings (Grayson 1975, 25–28, 115–124; Glassner 2004; preliminary editions of many new chronicle texts to be published by van der Spek and Finkel are available at www.livius.com). The astronomical diaries are also important for historical purposes, as, in addition to recording celestial phenomena, they contain many details of contemporary events.

While the cuneiform data is abundant, we know that it only gives us a skewed picture. It is certain that a huge amount of the documentary record was written on papyrus and parchment. These media do not survive, but their existence is hinted at both by references to such scrolls in the cuneiform texts and through the recovery of thousands of the clay bullae used to seal them. Papyrus and parchment must have been used for writing both Greek and Aramaic. Both languages were likely used for recording and communicating a large range of texts—decrees, official administration, private letters, contracts, and so on. Greek must in addition have certainly been used for writing down the constitutions of the cities and civic communities founded by the Seleucids, their laws codes, records of their assemblies, cadastral registers, and other municipal transactions, as well as philosophy and literature.

Outline History of Seleucid Babylonia

These are the materials from which the history of the Seleucids in Mesopotamia can be written. The full picture is complex, and it is not our intention to give a detailed reprise here, but it will be helpful to outline the key events. General outlines of Seleucid history can be found in Walbank 1993, 123–140; Austin 2003; Shipley 2000, 286–293 and 320–322; Boiy 2004, 99–192; Romm 2012; Kosmin 2014a, 16–24; Chrubasik 2016; specific to Mesopotamia, Rostovtzeff 1954, 184–198; Boiy 2004, 117–192.

Historical Framework

Following his defeat of Darius III at Gaugamela in 331 BC, Alexander moved swiftly to consolidate his victory. Stopping only briefly in Arbela (modern Erbil), he advanced south towards the seat of power, culminating with his entry into Babylon, an event recorded in an astronomical diary (Sachs and Hunger 1988, 179). He was greeted by the senior civic officials, priests, and people, who showered him with flowers and gifts. Alexander sacrificed in Esagila, the temple of Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon (and in effect, therefore, the national god of Babylonia) and ordered the rebuilding of Esagila and Etemenanki (the temple and ziggurat (temple tower) of Marduk): this is not only documented in classical sources but is also referred to in a chronicle entry and in astronomical diaries, and verified by cuneiform texts recording the payment of silver for associated work.

Following his death in Babylon in 323 bc, Alexander was succeeded by his half-brother Arrhidaeus, son of Philip II; Arrhidaeus was recognized as king by the Macedonian army, taking the throne name Philip (III). Technically he was to be followed by Alexander's own son Philip (IV). Actual power, however, was in the hands of Alexander's generals, the so-called Diadochoi ("successors")—Perdiccas, Seleucus, Argon, Antigonus (Monophthalmus), Ptolemy, Peithon, Atropates, Lysimachus, and Antipater. In theory, Perdiccas was supreme among these, but almost immediately the situation unraveled and the empire quickly fragmented. In the First Diadoch War (322–320 bc) Perdiccas's supremacy was challenged. In Babylonia, fighting broke out between Archon, the incumbent and confirmed satrap of Babylonia, and Docimus, newly appointed by Perdiccas; this ended with the death of Archon. The war itself ended with Perdiccas being murdered at the hands of Seleucus and Peithon after his soldiers had mutinied while campaigning in Egypt against Ptolemy. This paved the way for a formal division of the empire, transacted at the settlement of Triparadisus (in Syria) in 320 bc: Antigonus I (Monophthalmus), satrap of Greater Phrygia, was given Asia, and Seleucus, who must have in the meantime occupied Babylonia and dislodged Docimus, was confirmed in his possession of the satrapy and assigned in addition the lands to the east; (upper) Mesopotamia and Arbelitis, that is the district of Arbela, was given to Amphimachus, a brother-in-law of Alexander. Antipater was appointed regent in Macedonia.

The death of Antipater led to the Second Diadoch War (319–316 bc), a civil war between the nominated successor Polyperchon (a general of Alexander) and Antipater's son Cassander. The history of Babylonia at this time is covered by Boiy 2004 and van der Spek 2010. After hostilities fought in the west, the war ended when Antigonus invaded Mesopotamia in 316 bc and established a peace with Seleucus. This did not last long, however, the breakdown leading to the Third Diadoch War (316–311 bc). Seleucus fled to Egypt, to the court of Ptolemy, from where he planned the reconquest of his lands, something which he achieved in 311 bc; it is this year that forms the first year of the Seleucid calendar. A peace treaty concluded in 311 bc

divided the empire between Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Antigonus, excluding Seleucus. Both Seleucus and Antigonus claimed to be general of Asia, and war between the two was inevitable. The war was fought in Babylonia. An important source for this is the Diadochoi Chronicle, which speaks of the suffering and devastation inflicted on the country. The war concluded with Seleucus defeating Antigonus, and in the ensuing peace treaty the eastern half of the empire was assigned to Seleucus and the western half to Antigonus (the border being the Euphrates). In the Fourth Diadoch War (307–301 bc), a coalition of Seleucus, Ptolemy, Cassander, and Lysamachus fought against Antigonus and his son Demetrius. This came to an end in 301 bc at the Battle of Ipsus. Antigonus was defeated and slain and Seleucus absorbed Syria and eastern Asia Minor into his empire. At some point during this time Seleucus founded a new capital city, Seleucia, on the west bank of the Tigris some 60 km north of Babylon.

The First Syrian War (274–271), between Antiochus I (Soter) and Ptolemy II, did not involve hostilities in Babylonia, but the satrapy was nevertheless heavily affected by taxation and the levying of troops. The same was no doubt the case with the Second Syrian War (260–253 bc), waged between Ptolemy II and Antiochus II, and ending with a peace in which Antiochus married a daughter of Ptolemy. After the death of Antiochus, the union in fact caused complications which led to the Third Syrian War (246–241 bc). Ptolemy invaded Syria, and after this, Babylonia. A salient event in the reign of Seleucus II is the revolt of the Parthian leader Arsaces and his wresting away of Parthia and Hyrcania, a development that was to prepare the way for the eventual emergence of the Parthian Empire. Seleucus III attempted a conquest of the Attalid kingdom of Pergamum. In the reign of Antiochus III, Molon, the satrap of Media, revolted and captured Seleucia but was subsequently defeated; Antiochus was subsequently defeated in the Fourth Syrian War (219–217), against Ptolemy IV, but did succeed in reasserting control over the eastern empire. In the Fifth Syrian War (209–195 bc), Antiochus acquired large parts of Syria and Asia Minor, but was defeated by the Romans, first at Thermopylae (191 bc) and then again at Magnesia (190 bc). Little is known of the reign of Seleucus IV. In the Sixth Syrian War (171–168 bc) Antiochus IV invaded Egypt, successfully but had to withdraw after the Romans conquered Macedonia in 168 bc. Antiochus put down the revolt of Judas Maccabeus but was then unseated following revolts of both his cousin Demetrius in the west and of Timarchus, satrap of Media, in the east. Demetrius defeated and killed first Antiochus and then Timarchus, assuming the throne as Demetrius I. He was in turn defeated and killed by Alexander Balas, who married a daughter of Ptolemy VI but was then deposed when Ptolemy changed sides and supported Demetrius's son, who succeeded as Demetrius II. This Demetrius conducted a successful invasion of Egypt and put down a revolt of Antiochus VI, a son of Alexander Balas. The end of Seleucid rule was however very near. In 141 bc the Parthian Mithradates I invaded Mesopotamia and overthrew Demetrius. An attempt by Demetrius to regain Babylonia in 138 bc failed. In 130 bc his brother Antiochus VII did retake Babylonia, evicting the Parthian ruler Phraates II and reasserting Seleucid control. This lasted only briefly, however. Antiochus extended himself into Susa and Ecbatana, but in 129 bc Phraates struck back, capturing Seleucia and bringing Seleucid rule in Mesopotamia to an end.

Administration of the Empire

The administrative framework of the Seleucid empire in Mesopotamia (fig. 12.1) was taken over from its Achaemenid predecessors. The king ruled at the head of a court composed of ministers and counselors (Strootman 2014). These were almost entirely Greek. The major

division of the empire was into satrapies, each under the authority of a satrap (Greek *strategos*). While the number and extent of the Seleucid satrapies is not known, it does appear that the Seleucid empire had more than the Achaemenid empire (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 42–48). Seleucus divided Mesopotamia into two satrapies, Assyria in the north and Babylonia in the south, but by the time of Antiochus III, Mesopotamia was divided up into at least Babylonia, Parapotamia (along the middle Euphrates, capital at Dura-Europos), the Erythrean (Red) Sea (later Mesene/Characene), and Apolloniatis (along the Diyala). The empire had multiple capitals, including Seleucia on the Tigris, Antioch, Sardis, and Seleucia Pieria, an organization well suited for an empire of this size.

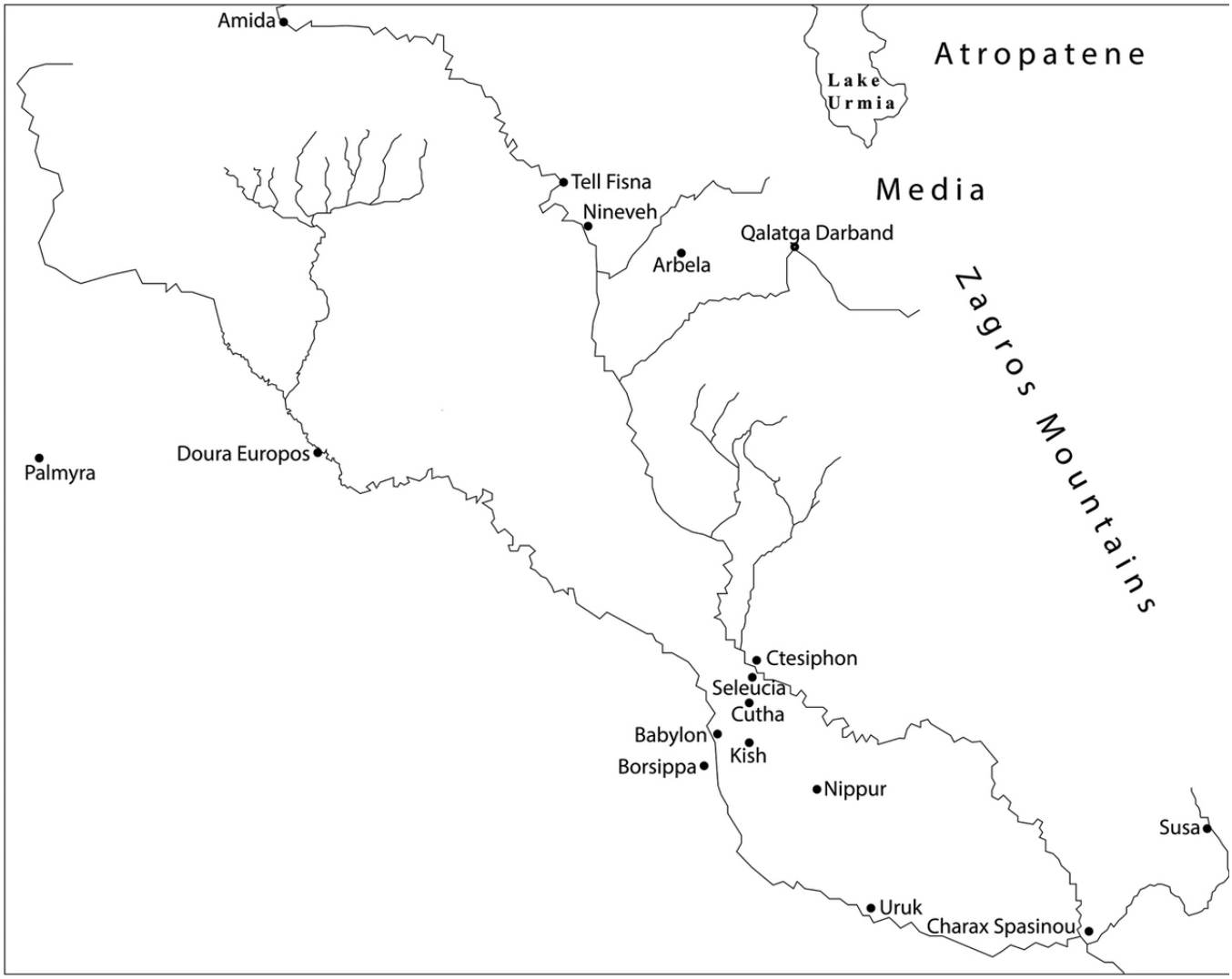

FIGURE 12.1. Hellenistic sites mentioned in the text. Map by John MacGinnis.

The impact of Seleucid rule on Babylonia can be assessed from the evidence of historical sources, archaeological excavations, and numismatics. First, it should be noted that the governing ideology of the Seleucid rulers was pragmatic—a policy of utilizing local institutions, which allowed for a smooth transition and facilitated the exercise of power while at the same time giving the regime a veneer of legitimacy. This is very much in line with the theory of government of the Achaemenids. But that is not to say that Seleucid policy was governed by excessive conservatism. Most saliently, this is demonstrated by the transfer of the seat of

power from Babylon to the new capital at Seleucia on the Tigris. While the move did not initially cripple Babylon (it survived on into the third century AD), the shifting of the center of control from the Euphrates to the Tigris, and away from a city that had been a capital city for the better part of two thousand years, constituted a monumental change.

Seleucia

The foundation of Seleucia allowed Seleucus to consolidate his rule with a Greek capital with Greek administrators free from the entrenched Babylonian elite (for a comparison with the strategy of foundations in Egypt under the Ptolemies, see Mueller 2005). It may be that a portion of the population of Babylon was forcibly moved to Seleucia: although a passage in an astronomical diary concerning a delegation sent to Seleucia is no longer taken to support this (Boiy 2004, 141–142), the statements in classical sources (Paus. 1.16.3; Plin., *HN* 6.30.121) remain, and Babylonian burial customs attested at Seleucia offer evidence for a Babylonian component to the population. The creation of a new capital city must in any case have demanded a huge influx of labor. The scale of the new city of Seleucia is borne out by the results of excavations. Two major expeditions have carried out work at the site: an American expedition in 1927–1937 and an Italian expedition in 1963–1976 and 1985–1989 (Invernizzi 2010). The city was built to a grid plan. A canal through the middle separated an area of public buildings on the northern side from residential blocks to the south. An agora with stoas was bordered on the west by an administrative building that contained over 25,000 sealings and is the largest known archive building of the Hellenistic world. A huge baked brick mass on the north side of the agora is postulated to be the remains of a theater. The city must have had numerous temples, and two of the buildings excavated in the 1930s were indeed identified by the American expedition as temples, although to which deities is unknown; conversely, a Greek-Parthian bilingual inscription indicates that somewhere in the city there was a temple to Apollo that has not so far been found. Seleucia was also home to a major mint, founded around 300 BC and continuing in operation into the Parthian period (Houghton and Lorber 2002; Houghton, Lorber, and Hoover 2008). Other major buildings, not least the royal palace of the Seleucid kings, await discovery.

The finds from the site attest to a material culture that is first of all Greek, but with Babylonian and Iranian elements. The iconography of the seals from the archive building is, for example, predominantly Greek (with depictions of the gods Apollo, Athena, Eros, Tyche, Artemis, Aphrodite, Heracles, and Dionysus), but also includes Babylonian priests and Iranian-style hunting scenes. Similarly, while the majority of terracotta figurines found at Seleucia are of Greek derivation (Greek gods, athletes, theatrical masks), a significant number (notably nude females and rider figurines) are in the Near Eastern tradition, although also displaying Greek elements (Menegazzi 2014, 1:41–75). The vernacular architecture also exhibits hybridization, combining Babylonian courtyard plans together with columns and *prostas* (vestibule).

Seleucid Babylonia

While Seleucia was the first new city to be established by the Seleucids in Babylonia, it was not the only one; subsequent foundations include Antioch-on-the-Ishtar Canal, Seleucia-on-the-Red Sea, and Apamea-Silhu (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1994, 325; Cohen 2013). There were,

incidentally, also pre-Seleucid Greek communities in Mesopotamia—note, for example, the statement of Herodotus (6.119) that there was a colony of Boeotians who had been deported by Xerxes to the region of Sittakene, in present-day Kurdistan (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987, 4). All of these, or certainly at least the Seleucid foundations, are likely to have been self-governing colonies (*poleis*) with charters and constitutions. The same must also apply to the Greek colony in Babylon, certainly in existence by the time of Antiochus IV though with roots going back to the garrison established by Alexander (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987, 20). Babylon had a theater and a gymnasium, excavated by Koldewey, and while it must have had a temple, this has not so far been discovered, nor has any archaeological evidence been found for the harbor for a thousand ships that Arrian (7.19.4) says Alexander commenced work on. But excavations have yielded a package of Hellenistic material culture such as terracotta figurines, engraved gemstones, pottery, and ostraka. In addition to this was coinage. Alexander the Great founded a mint at Babylon, which became famous for its lion staters (fig. 12.2); it is not known when it ceased operation (Boiy 2004, 44–45).

FIGURE 12.2. Babylon stater of Alexander the Great (courtesy British Museum).

The Greek community in Babylon consisted of citizens (*pu-li-ṭe-e, pu-li-ṭa-nu* = *politai*) and conducted Greek pageants (*pu-up-pe* = *pompē*). In due course there was even a Stoic school in Babylon, founded by Archedemus of Tarsus.

Throughout the Hellenistic period, the backbone of Babylonian civil society continued to be the temple communities. This was a situation inherited from the Achaemenids, and indeed from deep antiquity. Every city had a main temple whose governing board of chief administrator (the *šatammu* in Babylon, the *rab ša rēš āli* in Uruk) and senior scribes oversaw the running of not only religious operations but also of the land holdings, flocks, and other property owned by the temple. The temple also functioned as a court (Clancier 2011). The senior administration was drawn from the ranks of leading families who monopolized the top civic offices and thereby maintained themselves as a self-perpetuating elite. Their interests meshed well with those of the central government, as they provided a smooth channel for the communication of royal policy. It was a symbiotic relationship to the clear benefit of each side. This generally held true

regardless of who was in power, and indeed the Babylonian temple communities provided anchors of stability through periods of turmoil. This was certainly the case during the periods of regime change that occurred with the successive transitions from Assyrian to Babylonian and then Achaemenid, Greek, and finally Arsacid rule. This conservativism helped to keep cuneiform writing alive, as the temple communities continued to use the medium for both administration and scholarship well after Akkadian had been replaced by Aramaic as the demotic and at a time when government administration was conducted in Greek; this has had the welcome effect of preserving rich evidence for life in Babylonia under Seleucid rule. It is therefore clear that throughout the Seleucid period the temples continued in operation, the offerings systems were maintained, and rituals were performed. Numerous inscriptions attest to royal support of Babylonian temples. This started right at the beginning of Greek rule with Alexander's clearing of the rubble of Esagila and Etemenanki, a task possibly completed under Antiochus I. Another example is Antiochus I's restoration of Esagila and Ezida (the temple of Nabû in Borsippa) recorded in a cylinder of that king from Borsippa, incidentally the last known cuneiform royal inscription from Mesopotamia (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1991; Stevens 2014; Kosmin 2014b; see also the edition by Stol and van der Spek on www.livius.com). The massive investment in the Bit Reš and Anu temples at Uruk is further evidence of a policy favoring the temples. There was, however, nothing altruistic about this patronage; it was part of the process of forging alliances with the native elite (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1994, 326–327; Pirngruber 2017; Monerie 2018). In return, the Seleucid rulers exacted taxation, which could be heavy (Boiy 2004, 134; van der Spek 1985). Another way in which the kings benefited was in the maintenance of a royal cult for the well-being of the king and his family (Glassner 2004, 255; van der Spek 1985, 557–562). There was in fact an ambiguity in Seleucid policy toward the temples. A celebrated illustration of this is the case of landed estates given to the temples of Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha by Antiochus I in 280 bc, taken back in 276 bc, then given by Antiochus II to his wife, before then being returned to the temples once again (van der Spek 1993).

As mentioned above, cuneiform writing continued in use in Babylonia in the Hellenistic period, employed for a variety of roles connected with the temple and the wider temple community. Scholarship was alive and well, as attested not only by the copying of literary texts, but also from the surviving passages of the *Babyloniaca*, a work written by the Babylonian priest Berossus to present the culture of Babylonia to its new Greek rulers (it is dedicated to Antiochus I). The surviving fragments clearly demonstrate that Berossus was working from cuneiform sources and as such his work can lay claim to a unique degree of reliability; this has not always been appreciated (van der Spek 2008; De Bruecker 2011; Haubold et al. 2013). A specialist branch of scholarship that continued to thrive was astronomy/astrology, something evidenced both in cuneiform texts—the latest cuneiform record so far recovered is an astronomical text dating to ad 75—and in classical sources. Last, mention should be made of the "Graeco-Babyloniaca," a fascinating set of clay tablets that bear excerpts of cuneiform scholastic works on one side with transliterations into Greek on the other (Geller 1997; Westenholz 2007).

This leads to one of the most important issues of the period, the question of Hellenization. This is a complex topic on which much has been written; but succinctly put: To what extent did the Greek and Macedonian presence in Babylonia impact the indigenous culture? We can start with a formulation of Sherwin-White and Kuhrt: "The criteria of 'hellenisation' are usually taken to mean not merely the adoption of Greek coinage, names, institutions and Greek words, but also Greek political practices, lifestyles and literary, artistic and architectural ideas…. [T]he most convincing evidence is when an individual or community adopts the culture, language, religion and political practices of another culture" (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 145). Judging by these criteria, the degree to which Babylonia was Hellenized was limited. Babylonians and

Greeks lived in two parallel communities (van der Spek 2004). Each had their own structure and governance and maintained their own distinctive way of life, religious beliefs, and language. The Babylonian population groups were centered around the corresponding temple communities governed by a council (*kiništu*) headed by the chief of the temple administration. The Greek communities were focused on an assembly and council of elders (*pe-li-ga-na-nu* = *peliganes*), who probably convened in theaters, where available. All of these came under the authority of the appropriate regional governor.

Differences between these two communities are observable in the archaeological record. At Seleucia, both the architecture and the material culture (notably pottery and figurines) are manifestly Greek; this is also true for a sector of Babylon. An analysis of the ceramics at Uruk demonstrates an important component of forms imported from the west, as do the figurines from the site and the iconography on sealings (Petrie 2002; Ristvet 2015, 168–175). Otherwise, most Babylonian cities of the time appear to be much more characterized by their lack of ostensible Hellenization; whether this is a correct assessment or a reflection of selective factors in excavation choices, publication, and interpretation needs further research. Where there is a Greek dimension, however, this is mainly due to the presence of the Seleucid administration (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 149). A small number of high-level Babylonians strove to demonstrate their adoption of the culture of their rulers by taking on (or being rewarded with) Greek names (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 150–153). Examples are the governor (*šaknu*) of Uruk Anu-ikṣur given the second name Nikarchos by Antiochus I, and another governor of Uruk Anu-uballiṭ who had the second name Kephalon in the time of Antiochus III (there is no example of a Greek or Macedonian taking a Babylonian name). But the number who did this was probably very small, and confined to members of the top tier of the indigenous social structure who interacted closely with the Seleucid administration. In general, the ethnic segregation is sufficiently stark that van der Spek (2005) does not shy away from using the term apartheid; the situation has also been compared to the British raj in India. While the situation outside of the major cities is not so well known, there were certainly Greek colonies in the countryside (and it may be hoped that future archaeological research may identify some of these). Undoubtedly this led to tensions. A Babylonian chronicle records hostilities between Greek settlers and rural Babylonians after the death of Antiochus IV, and this is unlikely to have been an isolated incident (van der Spek 2005, 399–400, 402–403). The conclusion must be that Babylonia was only superficially Hellenized: the Seleucid kings did not pursue a program of active Hellenization—this might indeed have been contrary to their interest—and once Seleucid rule finished, the Greek elements in the material and social culture of Babylonia melted away.

Seleucid Assyria

The preceding sections deal with southern Mesopotamia under Macedonian and Seleucid rule. Much less is known of the Hellenistic period in the northern half of the region, the erstwhile Assyria. This is a direct result of the devastation wrought on Assyria at the fall of the empire (MacGinnis 2018). The destruction of the Assyrian capitals and the depopulation of the countryside set back the economic development of the region for a considerable period. The Achaemenid era, in all probability, witnessed a steady regrowth, and by the Hellenistic period settlement was well on the way to recovery (Morandi-Bonacossi and Iamoni 2015, 29). The fact that the two sites of Tell Deir Situn and Grai Darki, excavated in the course of the Eski Mosul salvage project, had only Hellenistic occupation has been taken to indicate that there was a degree of security in the region during the Hellenistic period that was lacking at other times (C

urtis, Green, and Knight 1987–1988). Nevertheless, the inevitable centering of government in the south of Mesopotamia resulted in the comparative neglect of the north; a side effect is that the region was of much less interest to the Greek historians. Furthermore, the fact that the use of cuneiform writing died out in northern Mesopotamia immediately after the fall of Nineveh (612 BC) means that we do not have the rich sources of information available for Babylonia at this time. A single exception is the as yet undeciphered tablet from Tell Fisna (a site on the east bank of the Tigris, 40 km north of Mosul) which Jeremy Black (1997) dated to the Hellenistic period, with the suggestion that it may indicate the survival of an isolated continuation of the cuneiform tradition in the north. Logically there should be at least one exception to this pattern. On the juncture of the western Zagros with the plains of upper Mesopotamia, the ancient city of Arbela appears to have survived the fall of Assyria relatively unscathed (see Mac Ginnis 2014, 36–38). It became in due course a provincial administrative center under the Achaemenids and later on, in the Parthian period, the capital of the independent kingdom of Adiabene. As mentioned, Arbela was assigned to Amphimachus at the settlement of Triparadisus, and there can be little doubt that the city must have served as the seat of a provincial administration throughout the Seleucid period; it may be hoped that excavations on the citadel mound of Erbil may one day yield material evidence of this. Furthermore, surveys currently under way in the Kurdish Region of Iraq are beginning to document the occupational history of the region in the Hellenistic period, though as yet only preliminary results are available (see, for example, Palermo 2016; Palermo, de Jong, and Ur 2022). At Nineveh, the evidence for Greek institutions and the worship of Greek gods in the Parthian period (Scott and MacGinnis 1990, 69–71; Reade 1998; Palermo 2017) may be taken to suggest that the city was already organized as a *polis* in Seleucid times (though, as discussed by Invernizzi (2005), there is a question as to whether some of the Greek iconography had in fact been adopted for the representation of Iranian gods). Most recently, the newly instigated excavations at the site of Qalatga Darband on the Darband-i Rania Pass in eastern Iraqi Kurdistan have produced evidence for strong Hellenistic influence in terms of statuary (fig. 12.3), architectural elements including column parts and terracotta roof tiles, and olive presses, all of a Greek/east Mediterranean type (MacGinnis et al. 2020; MacGinnis 2022). While it is not yet clear whether the site is purely Parthian in date or that it was rather actually founded in the late Seleucid period, either way it demonstrates the impact of Hellenism in the region. This shows clearly that to understand more about northern Mesopotamia in the Seleucid period what we need most of all is more excavation.

FIGURE 12.3. Hellenistic statue from Qalatga Darband (courtesy Darband-i Rania Archaeological Project).

Roman Operations in Mesopotamia

In 146 BC, mainstream Seleucid rule in Mesopotamia came to an end when Mithridates I invaded Babylonia, bringing it under the control of the newly expanding Parthian Empire. It is not known for certain when northern Mesopotamia also came under Parthian control, but it is generally assumed to have been around this time. According to Marciak (2017, 424), Mithridates I conquered northern Mesopotamia in around 145–141 BC; Oates (1968, 63–66) noted that the Hellenistic village at Nimrud was abandoned some time after 146 BC. In any case, by this point the territory of the former Assyrian heartland appears to have been largely incorporated within the kingdom of Adiabene. While the origins of Adiabene are obscure, a number of theories can be proposed (for further remarks, see Marciak 2017): (1) it is possible that Adiabene emerged as early as the late seventh century BC, in the wake of the collapse of the Assyrian empire: if so, the kingdom would then, at least initially, have been a component of the area under Median hegemony, prior to being absorbed by the Achaemenid empire; (2) Adiabene could have formed in the wake of Alexander's overthrow of the Achaemenid empire and the subsequent disintegration of Alexander's own empire; (3) Adiabene may have formed in the wake of the collapse of the Seleucid empire. The western Parthian Empire was in fact characterized by a network of client kingdoms that came within the Parthian federation and also served as a buffer with Rome; the best known of these are Armenia, Osrhoene, Gordyene, Hatra, Adiabene, Characene, Atropatene, Elymais, and Persis, but there were numerous smaller ones as well (Marciak 2017; Schuol 2000). The macro-political history of the ensuing centuries is defined initially by the interplay of power politics among Rome, Parthia, and Armenia, and then, following the absorption of Armenia into the Roman provincial system, by the superpower rivalry between the Roman and Parthian Empires. Adiabene, along with northern Mesopotamia more generally, was repeatedly caught up in this. Due to the perishable nature of the material on which most Parthian records were kept and the destruction of archives by the Sasanians, the greater part of our information for this period comes from classical sources (see Widengren 1983; Wiesehöfer 1998; Hackl, Jacobs, Weber 2010; Wiesehöfer and Müller 2017; Curtis and M agub 2020).

For overviews of Roman operations in Mesopotamia, see Mommsen 1886, 1–115; Gregory an d Kennedy 1985, ch. 2; Lieu and Dodgeon 1991; Millar 1993; Kennedy 1996; Ball 2000, 10–30; Greatrex and Lieu 2002; Butcher 2003; Edwell 2007; Mosig-Walburg 2009; Sommer 2006; Shel don 2010; Ball 2016, 8–27; Palermo 2019; Cameron 2019; Overtoom 2020. The first formal contact between the Romans and the Parthians was in 92 bc, when Mithradates II sent an envoy by the name of Orobazes to meet Sulla in Cilicia. The meeting was not an unqualified success. Nevertheless, treaties with Parthia were successively concluded by Sulla in 96 bc, Lucullus in 68 bc, and Pompey in 65 bc (Keaveney 1981; Sherwin-White 1984, 218–226; Isaac 1 998, 28; Sheldon 2010, 13–16). However, in that same year, 65 bc, Pompey authorized two operations in Mesopotamia that were highly aggressive, first ordering his general Gabinius to secure Armenia by crossing the Euphrates and advancing up the Tigris, then ordering Afranius to lead a second military foray into Mesopotamia as far as Arbela. While neither of these episodes was technically directed against the Parthians, both were threatening actions that foreshadowed the storm to come. That storm finally broke in 53 bc with Crassus's unprovoked invasion of Parthia, which culminated so disastrously for the Romans in the destruction of three

legions at Carrhae at the hands of the Parthian general Suren (Sampson 2008; Sherwin-White 1984, 279–290).

Conflict between Rome and Parthia (Fig. 12.4) carried on until 20 bc, when the emperor Augustus concluded a treaty with Phraates IV, who returned the standards of the legions defeated at Carrhae (Curtis and Magub 2020, 47). This ushered in more than a century of peace.

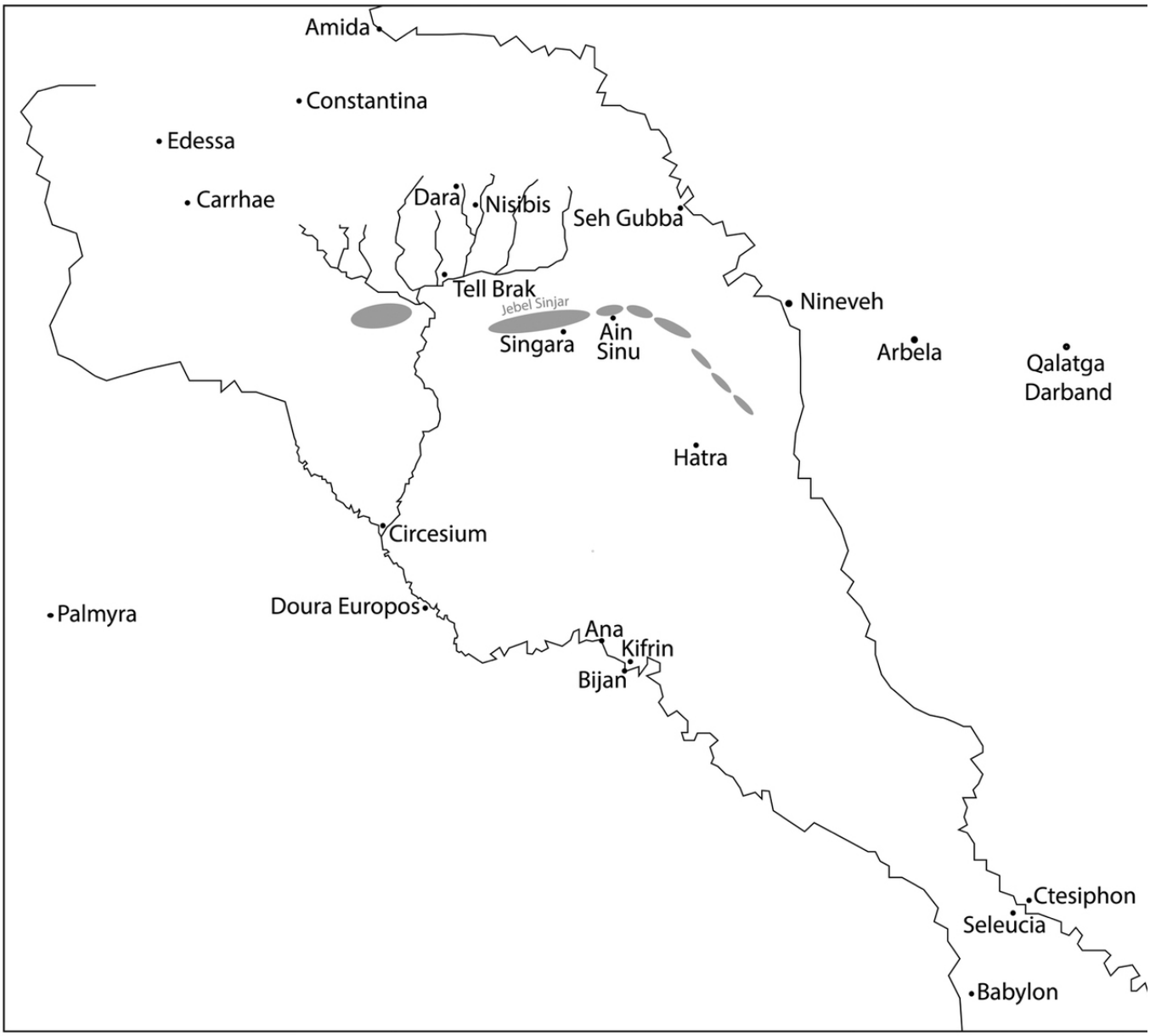

FIGURE 12.4. Roman/Parthian sites mentioned in the text. Map by John MacGinnis.

In the second century this came to an end, and the territory was subject to sporadic Roman invasions. The first of these was the attack on Parthia launched by Trajan on the pretext that the Parthians had appointed Khosraw as king of Armenia without Roman consultation. In ad 115 Trajan, following his defeat of Armenia the previous year, invaded northern Mesopotamia, crossing the Tigris and defeating Mebarsapes of Adiabene. A destruction level at Erbil discovered in the recent excavations on the citadel is tentatively interpreted as evidence of Trajan sacking the city, something not mentioned in the written sources (al-Yaqoobi,

Shepperson, and MacGinnis 2018); a destruction level at Tell Barri (in the Habur in Syria) with a coin of Trajan is likewise thought to be attributable to this campaign (see Palermo 2019: 28). Trajan then moved south into Babylonia, where he captured Ctesiphon and even progressed as far as Susa. He clearly saw that Rome would be able to retain at least some of these newly vanquished territories, and, if later sources are to be believed, organized them into the two new provinces of Assyria and Mesopotamia. Opinions differ on the nature of these provinces—from the maximalist, that they covered upper and lower Mesopotamia respectively (Maricq 1959); to the more restrictive, that Mesopotamia covered north-west Mesopotamia up to the Habur (therefore equating with the later province of Mesopotamia) while, if there really was a province of Assyria, it must have corresponded to Adiabene (Millar 1993, 101); to the minimalist, that there was in fact no province of Assyria, this being an invention of historians in the fourth century (Lightfoot 1990, 121–124). The last of these is probably closest to the mark. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that Trajan really did intend to organize Mesopotamia into Roman provinces and may even have put the first wheels into motion, though it has to be admitted that this never developed into a concrete reality; on the prefects of Mesopotamia, see Kennedy 1979 and Magioncalda 1982. To celebrate his accomplishment, Trajan commissioned the minting of at least three series of coins, with captions such as *Parthia capta* and *Rex Parthis datus* (fig. 12.5) (Curtis and Magub 2020, 51–53).

FIGURE 12.5. Coin struck by Trajan to commemorate his invasion of Parthia, with the legend REX PARTHIS DATUS on the reverse (courtesy British Museum).

The possession, however, was to be short-lived. While Trajan was wintering in Babylon, he received news that Adiabene was in revolt, with a Parthian army in the province. Trajan was forced to withdraw, besieging but failing to take Hatra on the way back. Following his death in ad 117, his successor Hadrian relinquished these conquests, bringing the border of the Roman Empire back to the Euphrates. The operation did, however, have the effect of prising Characene away from Parthian hegemony.

The next Roman involvement in Mesopotamia was not until half a century later. Following the declaration of war by Vologases III and the wiping out of a Roman legion in Armenia, in ad 165

the Roman general Avidius Cassius advanced down the Euphrates, recapturing Dura Europos and Ctesiphon and sacking Seleucia. Shortly afterward, however, Cassius's army was stricken by plague, and for a second time Roman forces occupying southern Mesopotamia were forced to withdraw. Nevertheless, the Romans were left in possession of Dura Europos and the border was moved up to the Habur.

There followed a period of disengagement that lasted until almost the end of the second century. Septimius Severus at the outset of his reign campaigned in the east to bring into line the coalition of states (Osrhoene, Adiabene, Hatra, Parthia) that had supported Pecennius Niger, the governor of Syria, in the civil war of ad 193. He invaded Mesopotamia in ad 197, capturing Seleucia and sacking Ctesiphon, but, just like Trajan, failing to take Hatra the following year. Treating his new title of Parthicus Maximus with appropriate caution, and having learned, perhaps, from the previous Roman experiences in the region, Severus made no attempt to impose imperial rule on the southern half of the land, but in the north he created two new provinces: Osrhoene, centered on Edessa, governed by a procurator of equestrian rank; and Mesopotamia, with its capital at Nisibis, governed by an equestrian prefect (Butcher 2003, 85; Palermo 2014). The external border of the province ran up the River Habur from its confluence with the Euphrates, along the southern edge of the Jebel Sinjar and then on eastward up to the Tigris. Two legions were stationed in the province, probably I and III Parthica (Kennedy 1987). Roman control of the Euphrates continued on south to Dura Europos and there is evidence for garrisons even further downstream at Ana, Kifrin, and Bijan (Butcher 2003, 55–56).

The newly defined limits were well considered and the province was to endure, with fluctuations, for the next four centuries. The essential stability of this arrangement was not, however, recognized by Severus's successor, Caracalla. In a thirst for glory in the manner of Crassus, a lesson one might have thought dissuasive, Caracalla launched himself against Parthia on the pretext of a trumped-up charge that the Parthian king Artabanus (IV) had spurned the offer to marry his daughter (Syvänne 2017, 249–263). In ad 216, Caracalla crossed the Tigris and advanced into Adiabene as far as Arbela, where he destroyed the royal tombs, and then proceeded to maraud through Media and Media Atropatene. While no pitched battle with the Parthians is recorded, Caracalla subsequently retreated toward Carrhae, suggesting either an appreciation that a deeper penetration into Parthia was impossible, or an actual defeat. The whole venture proceeded to unravel into utter disaster. In the following year Caracalla was murdered in Carrhae and his successor Macrinus, decisively defeated at the second Battle of Carrhae, sued for peace.

This was to prove Rome's last conflict with Parthia. Following the overthrow of the Parthian state and the establishment of the successor Sasanian Empire, Ardashir I invaded Mesopotamia and captured Ctesiphon in ad 226, following this up with the capture of Nisibis and Carrhae in ad 238; the site of Ain Sinu is thought to have been sacked at this time (Oates 1959). The presence of Roman soldiers in Hatra in at least ad 235 and 240 (Gawlikowski 1994, 47; Butcher 2003, 56) indicates that the city still fell within the sphere of Rome at that time, but it must have fallen to the Sasanians very shortly after. In ad 243, an army of Gordian III led by Timesitheus retook Nisibis, but this was followed by disastrous defeats at the hands of Shapur I in ad 244. Gordian died in the same year in mysterious circumstances; he was succeeded by Philip the Arab, whose first priority was to negotiate a peace with Shapur. Around ad 256, following another defeat at the hands of Shapur, Dura Europos fell, leaving the fortress of Circesium, at the confluence with the Khabur, as the southernmost Roman outpost on the Euphrates. For the Romans the nadir in their eastern wars came with the defeat and capture of Valerian by Shapur I at the battle at Edessa in ad 260 (fig. 12.6).

FIGURE 12.6. Relief at Naqsh-i Rustam showing Valerian standing and Philip the Arab kneeling before Shapur I (courtesy Vesta Curtis).

In ad 283 the emperor Carus led an expedition down into Babylonia, capturing Ctesiphon. It was probably while he was once again withdrawing from the south that the province of Mesopotamia was reestablished.

The fortunes of Mesopotamia as a Roman province continued to ebb and flow with the vicissitudes of the empire. In ad 297 it was taken by the Sasanians under Narseh, who was defeated in turn by Galerius the following year. The peace that ensued lasted for forty years, and under Diocletian the forts and road system of the eastern frontier was reorganized. The peace was finally broken by the resurgent Shapur II, who set himself with vigor to achieving the reconquest of Mesopotamia for the Sasanians. One by one he besieged and took the key strategic strongholds of Amida, Bezabde, Nisibis, and Singara. Eventually the emperor Julian was stirred into confronting this. Setting out from Antioch in ad 361, he led an expedition down the Euphrates and inflicted a major defeat on the Sasanians on the Nahr al-Malik canal (in central Babylonia). But his return journey up the Tigris was disastrous; the army was mauled and Julian himself was killed. In the negotiations that followed, his successor Jovian was forced to give up Nisibis and Singara. The capital of Mesopotamia was moved to Amida, with the senior military commander, the *dux mesopotamiae*, based at Constantina (modern Viranşehir, 90 km east of Urfa). A long period of apparent tranquility followed, interrupted by clashes in ad 421–422 and again in ad 439–442. Major hostilities recommenced in the early sixth century, with the Anastasian War (ad 502–506). In the course of this, in ad 505 the emperor Anastasius commenced construction of an immense new fortress at Dara, conceived as a counterbalance to the Sasanian stronghold at Nisibis, which lay only 18 km to the east. From then until the

Muslim invasions in the 630s the Romans and the Sasanians were repeatedly at war. In the mid-sixth century, in the reign of Justinian I, the province of Mesopotamia was split up, the northern parts being added to the province of Armenia IV and the southern parts divided into districts with capitals at Amida and Dara.

The Roman presence in Mesopotamia has left its imprint (see Oates 1968, 67–92; Gregory and Kennedy 1985; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995, 67–69; Gregory 1995–1997, 2:57–132; Ball 2000, 170; Edwell 2007 4–6; Ball 2016, 197; Palermo 2019). The remains of Nisibis lie largely below the modern city (Palermo 2014), but at Sinjar, probably the base of the legion I Parthica, large portions of the Roman fortifications survived into the early twenty-first century (Oates 1968, 97–106; Kennedy and Riley 1990, 125–131). The location of *castra maurorum*, another regional stronghold mentioned in the classical sources, has been tentatively identified as Seh Qubba, a site on a bluff overlooking the Tigris 90 km northwest of Mosul (Ball 1989; 2000, 18–19). Aerial images demonstrate the existence of numerous other forts in the surrounds of Sinjar (Kennedy and Riley 1990, 163–166, 193); the barracks and *castellum* excavated at Ain Sinu date to the third century (Oates 1968, 80–92; Kennedy and Riley 1990, 168–170). A small number of milestones have also been found (Oates 1968, 71, 74; Palermo 2018).

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CHAPTER 13

POMPEY AND THE NEAR EAST

NATHANAEL ANDRADE AND RUBINA RAJA

Pompey in the Near East

For specialists on the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, Pompey's campaigning in the Levant in 64–63 BC is widely recognized as a watershed moment. It marks Roman annexation of the region and its organization into a Roman province surrounded by a host of dependent kingdoms. It also represents how the balance of power in the region shifted dramatically within a short time (fig. 13.1).

FIGURE 13.1. Portrait of Pompey, courtesy of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

What remained of the Seleucid Empire was finally terminated, and a détente between Rome and Parthia became a long-standing, if sometimes volatile, feature of the Near East for the

following centuries. For such reasons, the transition from the Seleucid Empire's fragmentation to Pompey's activity in 64–63 BC justifiably represents the opening stage of most definitive monographs of the history of the Roman Near East (Sartre 2005, 37–44; Butcher 2003, 19–22; though Millar 1993 noticeably begins in earnest with 31 BC). It is also a pivot between the Hellenistic and Roman phases for a splendid account of the history of the Hellenistic and Roman Middle East (Sartre 2001, 436–451), and it remains a complex period to study due to the nature of the evidence (e.g. Raja 2017; 2022). In this chapter, an overview of Pompey's campaigning in the Levant, its background, and its immediate and long-standing effects is provided.

The Context of Pompey's Campaign

Pompey's campaign in the Levant in 64–63 BC occurred in the wake of serious political transformations in the region (fig. 13.2).

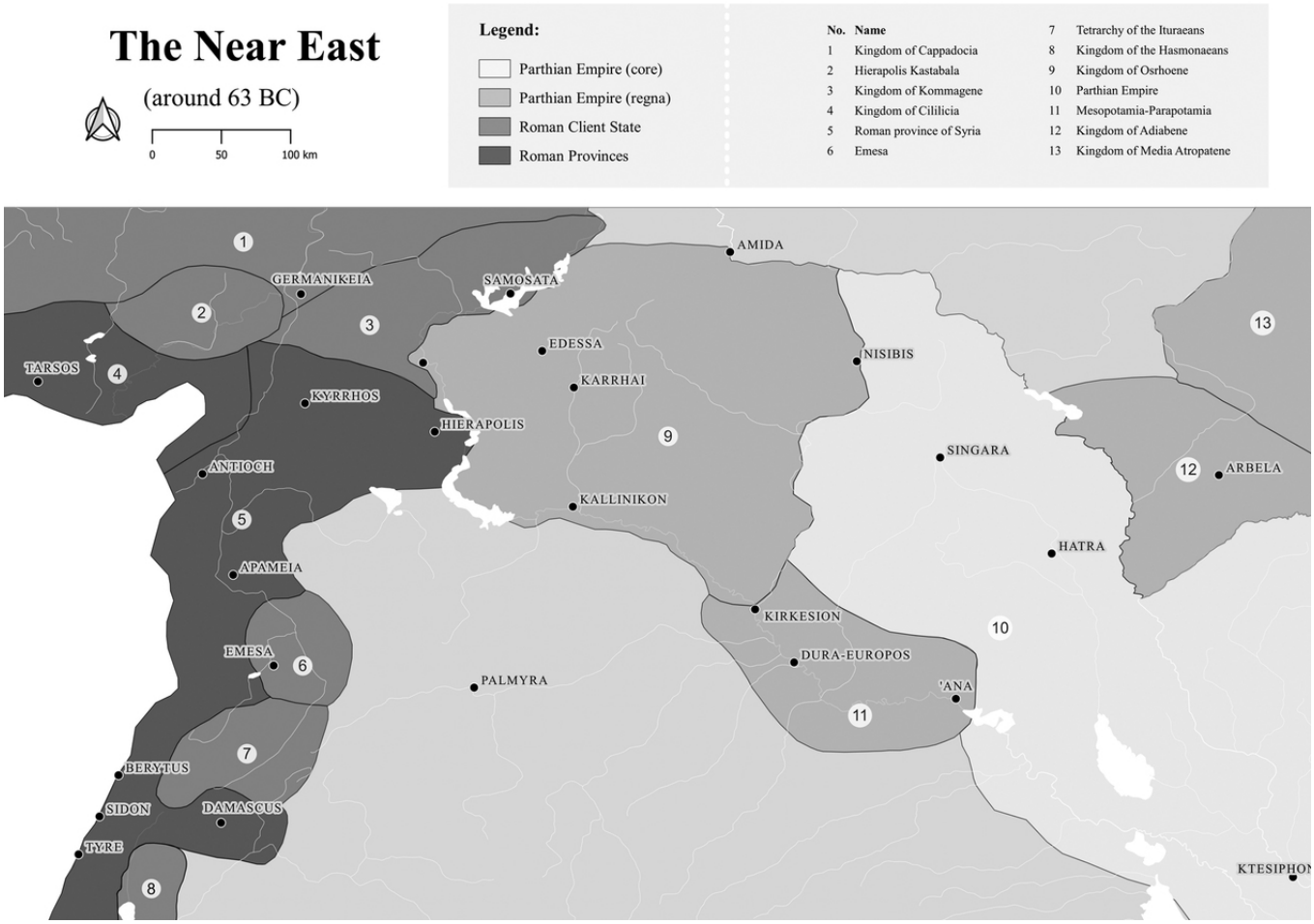

FIGURE 13.2. Map of Pompey's supposed intervention. @ Lilian Dibbern, Katarína Mokránová and Rubina Raja. Adapted after fig. 4.1 in Sommer, M. (2017). Palmyra: A History. Abingdon: Routledge.

These transformations were largely defined by the regression, internal fragmentation, and eventual collapse of Seleucid authority in the Near East over the prior century (Kosmin 2014). During that time, the Seleucid monarchy had lost all its Mesopotamian territories to the

expanding Parthian Empire, and in the Levant, it had ceded control to various regional dynasts in the face of various insurgencies, secessions, and civil wars (Ehling 2008). The Hasmonaeans had asserted control over greater Judaea, coastal Palestine, and certain adjacent cities in south Syria. Dynasts had exerted increasingly autonomous authority in Commagene, Emesa, and various parts of coastal and hinterland Lebanon. Tigranes II of Armenia, the son-in-law and ally of the powerful king of Pontus Mithridates VI, carved out an imperial terrain that encompassed Antioch and by all appearances a large part of Syria, probably in the 70s (Ehling 2008, 246–256; Hoover 2007 challenges traditional dating on the basis of coins). In Upper Mesopotamia and the Middle Euphrates, the Parthians and Armenians had in effect become the more dominant imperial powers.

As these transitions were occurring, the Roman Republic was intervening aggressively in the politics of the eastern Mediterranean and its hinterland, with the Roman province of Asia in western Turkey often being a pivot of contention. Mithridates and the Roman Republic had been enmeshed in a succession of wars in Anatolia, and even Greece, over the opening decades of the first century BC. Lucius Licinius Lucullus campaigned successfully against Mithridates and Tigranes from 73 to 67. His success enabled him to restore Antioch and most parts of Syria controlled by Tigranes to the Seleucid monarchy, though many autonomous dynasts remained (App., *Syr*. 49; Just., *Epit.* 40.2; Sullivan 1990, 203–204; Ehling 2008, 256–263). But amid mutinies and reversals inflicted on his subordinates by Mithridates, the Romans voted that his command be transferred to Pompey with the *lex Manilia* in 66 (Tatum 2006, 191–193).

Prior to the *lex Manilia*, Pompey had been granted an extensive command over the Mediterranean by the *lex Gabinia*. This had given him authority over virtually the entire Mediterranean and its coastal provinces so that he could eradicate the widespread piracy that had taken shape (Tatum 2006, 191–193; Steel 2013, 142–144). Having succeeded in a matter of months, Pompey acquired command over Lucullus's armies and authority over Anatolia through the *lex Manilia*. Pompey had defeated both Mithridates and Tigranes in Anatolia and Armenia by 65, and at that time he had entered negotiations with the Parthian king regarding the proper boundary between Rome and Parthia (App., *Mith.* 104; Plut., *Pomp.* 33.6; Edwell 2013, 192–193). From there, he turned his attention to the Levant. His activity shaped the contours of Roman authority in the region for centuries to come.

Pompey's Activity and Its Impact at Rome

Pompey's campaigning in the Levant in 64–63 BC can be reconstructed to a fair degree by literary sources, especially Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*. But despite the magnitude of his activity and its consequences, the surviving Roman historians and geographers often provide few specifics. In basic summary, after defeating Tigranes II in Armenia, Pompey and his staff arrived at Antioch and north Syria in 64, where they found the Seleucid dynasty, recently restored there by Lucullus, riven by yet more civil strife. Depriving it of any governance in the Levant, he spent the next year traveling with his army throughout Syria to organize the new province. While doing so, he stabilized or established relations with the ruling dynasties of various places that were to occupy the pivotal yet ambiguous position of being allies and dependents of Rome (for critique of the term client, see Kaizer and Facella 2010).

The sources are mostly sparing in their treatment of how Pompey interacted with client kings and local communities and the order in which he did so. These largely have to be reconstructed from incidental references (many contained in Sullivan 1990) and a logical inference that

Pompey and his staff generally moved through Syria from north to south (see Sartre 2005, 37–40; Ehling 2008, 271–277; now the detailed van Wijlick 2021, 41–60). Appian (*Mith.* 16.106) suggests that in 64 BC, after he had defeated Tigranes in Armenia, Pompey crossed the Taurus Mountains and fought against Antiochus I of Commagene, thus compelling him into submission and taking hostages (Plut., *Pomp.* 45) (fig. 13.3).

FIGURE 13.3. Stele of Antiochus I. Nathanael Andrade.

The claim of conflict may be exaggerated, as Antiochus I had already approached and obtained friendly terms from Lucullus (Cass. Dio 36.2.5; Facella 2010, 183). But given Antiochus's recent clientage to Tigranes, we can surmise that Pompey moved through Commagene with his army on his way to north Syria. Reaching Antioch, the main palace city of the Seleucids, he deposed their final king Antiochus XIII, who had been locked in civil war with his brother Philip II. The sources vary in their descriptions of what motivated Pompey's decision, but they do not fundamentally contradict one another. Altogether, the Romans had reclaimed by arms the territory that the Seleucid dynasty had ceded to Tigranes, and upon being restored by Lucullus, Antiochus had failed to maintain order and stability even in his limited area of control. Now disempowered, he was assassinated by the dynast of Emesa shortly after (App., *Syr.* 49; *Mith.* 106; Just., *Epit.* 40.2.5; Plut., *Pomp.* 39.2; Cass. Dio 37.7a; van Wijlick 2021, 50–52).

While in north Syria, Pompey had sent his legates, particularly Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, to intervene in Coele-Syria and the ancient city of Damascus, which had been a palace site for Iron Age Aramaean kings and eventually royal claimants from the splintered Seleucid dynasty. By all appearances, it had been a site of contention among various regional dynasts during the 80s–70s, including the rulers of the Nabataeans and the Ituraeans and the Armenian Tigranes II, as the Seleucid presence in the region had receded (Sartre 2005, 18–19). Pompey himself apparently reached Damascus by the end of 64 to winter there. Josephus's narrative sequence suggests that in the spring of 63 Pompey used Damascus as a launching point for pacifying Lebanon, Emesa, Judaea (Jos., *Ant.* 14.34–40), and Nabataea. More plausible is that he had already made contact with the dynasties at Emesa and at Chalcis in the Bekaa Valley, which would have been on his route from Antioch to Damascus in 64 (van Wijlick 2021, 55–56). Either way, Pompey eradicated various local dynasts in coastal Lebanon and its inland, mountainous areas while affirming in power (though without regal titles) the dynast Sampsigeramus at Emesa and, reportedly in exchange for a bribe, the Ituraean Ptolemy, son of Mennaeus, who had authority at Chalcis, the Bekaa Valley, and parts of the Lebanese highlands (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.39; Sullivan 1990, 199–200, 207; van Wijlick 2021, 55–56). While based at Damascus, Pompey soon intervened in the civil war waged by Hasmonaean factions in Judaea, while his lieutenant Marcus Aemilius Scaurus made an expedition against the Nabataean court at Petra, now governed by Aretas III who had been active in the Hasmonaean civil war (Wenning 1993, 32–33). The campaign did not capture the palace city, but it was strong enough for the Nabataeans to acknowledge themselves as Rome's dependent (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.80–81; Sullivan 1990, 209–210). Josephus, the most commonly accepted source, indicates that Pompey did not participate in person since he was diverted by the civil conflict of the Hasmonaeans.

Due to Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 14.18–79; *BJ* 1.120–158), we have more detailed information for how Pompey intervened in Judaea and Jerusalem, but his account is also known for its inconsistency, contradictions, and repetition of the same events, perhaps due to its integration of different sources (Sartre 2005, 42–44; Atkinson 2016, 145–157; Dąbrowa 2010, 99–101; Grabbe 2020, 431–435; van Wijlick 2021, 56–60). While Pompey was still in Armenia and then north Syria over 65–64, a civil war was being waged by the brothers Hyrcanus II and Aristoboulos II at Jerusalem. With military support from the Nabataean Aretas III, Hyrcanus's faction had hemmed Aristoboulos's waning forces within the enclosure of the Jewish Temple precinct in 64. Pompey's legate Scaurus, who had traveled from Damascus to Judaea, by all appearances assisted Aristoboulos in lifting the siege and forcing the Nabataeans to evacuate their forces (in exchange for a bribe, according to Josephus). When Pompey arrived in Damascus, both claimants sent him an embassy pleading their case; Josephus reports that a third faction supporting neither brother sent an embassy too. Pompey deferred judgment but apparently enjoined Aristoboulos to disband his army and fortresses (Scaurus had perhaps

made this demand already), and he also may have expected him to provide logistical support in his campaign against Nabataea (as Atkinson 2016, 153 argues). When Aristoboulos kept maintaining his forces and fortresses, Pompey opted to side with Hyrcanus, the elder of the two, and he besieged Aristoboulos at the Jewish Temple precinct (fig. 13.4).

FIGURE 13.4. View of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Nathanel Andrade.

Upon successful conclusion of the siege, Pompey entered the inner sanctum of the Jewish Temple in violation of prohibitions that prevented non-Jews and non-priests from doing so. Capturing Aristoboulos and his children, he had him paraded in his triumph at Rome in 62 (App., *Mith*. 17.117; Plut., *Pomp.* 45). Hyrcanus retained the high priesthood at Jerusalem, but not any royal title.

Otherwise, various Greek polities in coastal Palestine and Transjordan had been governed by the expanding Hasmonaean state for many decades, and Pompey seized the opportunity to integrate them into Roman governance and the new province that he was forming (Jos., *Ant.* 14.75–77; *War* 1.155–156). He restored civic hegemony over them to Greek civic populations, which now began to integrate members of ancestral Near Eastern populations on an amplified scale (Andrade 2010). This pattern, replicated in the centuries that followed, would have a huge impact on the formation of civic communities and identities in the Roman Near East (Andrade 2013). He also funded buildings and amenities in some of them, though Josephus perhaps exaggerates the scale of destruction that the Hasmonaeans had previously wrought. Ultimately,

these Greek cities would become the administrative basis for the southern part of the new province of Syria that Pompey formed.

In Rome, Pompey's campaigning in the Levant, and indeed his overall activity in the war against Mithridates and Tigranes, proved very controversial, and the controversy had serious effects on republican politics. Pompey could justify his campaign in Syria by the need to restabilize order in the region after the defeat of Mithridates and Tigranes under the extended command that he had been granted. But in truth, if Pompey's campaigns were spectacularly successful from a military standpoint, they were controversial within the senatorial elite. His extended commands gave him, a private citizen when he received them, an authority that was largely unprecedented and reminiscent of the unchecked power held by the controversially violent dictator Cornelius Sulla two decades earlier (Tatum 2006, 191–193; Steel 2013, 144–145). The campaign had also made Pompey uniquely powerful and wealthy, with plenty of local elites and dynasts in the eastern Mediterranean who had benefited from his favors. When Pompey returned in 62, he faced serious opposition in spite of his conciliatory gestures. Upon reaching Italy, Pompey disbanded his massive army, despite fears he could march on Rome as his patron Sulla had done decades earlier. But leading senators opposed measures to distribute land to his soldiers or to confirm universally the measures that he had undertaken during his extended command, and bills for these were not presented to Rome's voting assemblies (Steel 2013, 161–164). Such opposition is what prompted Pompey to form an alliance with Julius Caesar and Marcus Crassus ("the First Triumvirate") and to support Caesar's game-changing bid for the consulship of 59 BC. In this sense, Pompey's campaigning had a huge impact on politics at home and the course that the collapse of the Republic would take for the next twenty years.

Effects and Responses in the Near East

One of the main and obvious effects of Pompey's campaigns was the creation of Syria as a province and the Romans' intervention in a myriad of adjacent ruling dynasties. As momentous as they were for establishing Rome's imperial presence in Syria, Pompey's campaigns and decisions are widely recognized as largely affirming many of the dynasties that had acquired regional power in the Levant amid Seleucid decline. On a local and regional level, he accepted the legitimacy of dynasts who could claim to maintain stability. He typically deposed or eliminated those he deemed to be ineffective, an insurgent challenge to stable governance in a region, or prone to engineering civil conflicts. His decision to depose the Seleucids, recently restored in north Syria by Lucullus, was based on their inability to govern their former imperial terrain. For this reason, he made Syria into a Roman province overseen by a proconsular governor, though the province would continue to be organized and stabilized by Roman authorities into the 50s before being reconfigured by the triumvirs and Augustus.

In general, the logic behind Pompey's organization of the province of Syria is fairly clear. It largely consisted of lowland areas where Greek communities organized as *poleis* were concentrated (Sartre 2005, 42–44; Butcher 2003, 108, 113), and in some instances, Pompey had to wrest them from the realms of client dynasts (especially the Hasmonaeans) to effect this. In basic summary, the province consisted of Antioch and the Tetrapolis cities of northwest Syria and extended east toward the Euphrates, though Pompey allowed the bridgehead at Zeugma to be under the control of the Commagenian dynasts. Farther south, it included coastal Phoenicia, the area classified by the Seleucids as Coele-Syria (Dan and Nodet 2017, esp. 45–90; Isaac 2017, 124–134) extending as far east as Damascus, and the so-called Decapolis cities largely located in south Syria and Transjordan and formerly controlled by Hasmonaean dynasts

at the peak of their expansion or otherwise by the Nabataeans (Lichtenberger 2003). In fact, the origin of the concept of the Decapolis, unknown in the Hellenistic period and attested by Roman authors, probably originates with Pompey's clustering of Greek polities from the region into the new province (Cimadomo 2019, 89, 93; van Wijlick 2021, 59), even if Roman authors vary in their identification of the cities in it (Plin., *HN* 5.74, 77; Ptol., *Geog.* 5.14.22). The ancient sources suggest that various cities of coastal Palestine were integrated into the province after being separated from Hasmonaean Judaea. If so, Pompey's definition of provincial space in this particular region, as well as the "Decapolis" (Lichtenberger 2022; Bobou and Raja, chapter 26, this volume), would undergo substantial revision under the triumvirs and Augustus, who transferred many such cities to the control of Herod I or other client dynasts. Pompey had arguably organized the province and surrounding kingdoms with internal stability and the resolution of regional conflicts in mind, not defense against Parthia (Sartre 2005, 39, 43). But for the triumvirs and Augustus, defense became a real issue (van Wijlick 2021 generally; Bobou and Raja, chapter 14, this volume).

Surrounding the new province was an array of dependent realms, and in many cases, Pompey's endorsement of client dynasts is specified in the existing sources. Otherwise, his decision to eliminate certain dynasts and their strongholds had the effect of affirming the regional authority of figures that he supported. In Judaea, he eventually deemed Aristoboulos II, the pugnacious younger brother, to be illicitly at war with Hyrcanus II and had him brought to Rome and paraded in triumph, as already noted. We hear of local dynasts that Pompey had beheaded at Byblos, Tripolis, and a place called Lysias in the mountains of Lebanon (Sullivan 1990, 80; van Wijlick 2021, 55–56). Pompey's ostensible goal was to include some of these cities in the new province of Syria anyhow, but he apparently deemed these dynasts more of a threat to the regional authority of acceptable dynasts, especially the Ituraean Ptolemy who governed at Chalcis and proximate parts of Lebanon, than capable of exercising it themselves.

Otherwise, Pompey's decisions largely had the effect of reaffirming traditional dynastic rulers in their regions of control, and these largely weathered the collapse of the Republic, ensuing triumviral rule, and the rise of the Emperor Augustus by transferring their allegiances to key powers in Rome at the most opportune moment (van Wijlick 2021 generally). Only some of these held the title of king; others were only recognized as phylarch, chief priest (*archiereus*), or similar terms denoting that they governed a certain population. But all of them essentially exercised autocratic power in their areas of control. At the northeast end of the province of Syria, Pompey had promoted the Orontid dynast Antiochus I as the ruler of Commagene (Facella 2010, 183–184), which included the palace city of Samosata and the key bridgehead on the Euphrates at Zeugma (App., *Mith.* 114; Strabo 16.2.3; Facella 2006, 230–236; van Wijlick 2021, 43). The king would subsequently proceed to build an elaborate array of sacred sites and monumental areas and establish sculptural programs replete with Greek and Persian motifs whose functions, significations, impact, and precise relationship to Greek and Persian religious practices and royal ideologies remain objects of great scholarly interest and discussion (Versluys 2017; Canepa 2021; de Jong 2021). For decades Antiochus was generally successful in managing his space between the two great powers in the region, despite sometimes attracting suspicions from Roman authorities intervening in nearby areas (Cic., *Fam.* 15.4.4, for example: Facella 2010, 185–186) and being besieged by one of Marcus Antonius's commanders at Samosata in 38 (Cass. Dio 49.20.5; Jos., *BJ* 1.321–322; *Ant. Jud.* 14.445–447; Plut., *Ant.* 34.2–4; Facella 2010, 195).

On the eastern edge of Coele-Syria, where generally inhabitable areas began to transition into semi-desert, the Romans accepted the rule of Samsigeramus's dynasty at Emesa (van Wijlick 2021, 52–53). Farther east, Palmyra apparently lay beyond Pompey's gaze (as compellingly argued by Sommer 2017, 62–63), only to attract interest from Roman authorities in the

triumviral and Augustan periods (Hekster and Kaizer 2004). South of the realm controlled by the dynasty of Emesa were the regions and cities governed by Ituraean dynasts, who held sway from the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and the Bekaa Valley directly east into the Syrian Desert (Kropp 2013). The areas of the Syrian province situated in coastal Lebanon and the "Decapolis" effectively separated the realms of the Ituraean dynasts and, to the southwest, Hasmonaean Judaea. In greater Judaea, the Hasmonaean king Hyrcanus had been granted authority by Pompey, though at this particular moment he was only permitted to control lesser Judaea, immediate Transjordan, Idumaea, and Galilee. In areas of Transjordan abutting Hasmonaean territory and the Decapolis, the northern limits of the Nabataean empire could be found. Centered on the palace city of Petra, its northward extension probably stopped short of the Decapolis cities at this time (Sartre 2005, 22).

Connections: Did Pompey Have an Effect on the Connectivity of the Region?

Another enduring if volatile effect of Pompey's campaign was that the Romans established the upper segment of the Euphrates River, though not the middle segment, as the boundary between Roman and Parthian authority in the Near East (App., *Mith.* 104; Plut., *Pomp.* 33.6; Edwell 2013, 192–193), a status quo that arguably lasted until the Romans' successful campaigns in Mesopotamia in AD 165. Though this boundary was often breached by invading armies between Pompey's intervention and the second century AD, such breaches largely registered as invasions of rival territory. Likewise, though the client dynasts of both sides of the Euphrates could invite the support of rival powers for leverage, those west of the Euphrates largely persisted based on their clientage to Rome. Any attempts by the dynasts west of the Euphrates to exploit the successful Parthian campaigns into the Levant in 40–38 BC during the civil war period of Rome (discussed by van Wijlick 2021, 234–237), which involved an attempt by a son of Aristoboulos II to control Judaea with Parthian support (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.324–491; *BJ* 1.238–363) and suspicions that Antiochus I of Commagene was complicit (Cass. Dio 49.20.5; Jos., *BJ* 1.321–322; *Ant. Jud.* 14.445–447; Plut., *Ant.* 34.2–4; Facella 2010, 195), were reversed fairly quickly (Edwell 2013, 199).

At the same time, Pompey's intervention escalated the potential for violent tension between Rome and Parthia. When Pompey arrived, the kingdoms of Mithridates and Tigranes were the immediate concerns, and these both separated Rome from Parthia and rivaled Parthia in power. The Parthians were also in a position of weakness due to a long-standing civil war (Edwell 2013, 192; Overtoom 2021, 240–241). Despite the somewhat friendly negotiations between Pompey and Phraates III, Rome and Parthia generally operated with a robust distrust of the intentions and power of their new rival in the Near East. With a senior senatorial governor in Syria, the Romans could potentially promote an Arsacid royal of their choice whenever one sought their aid. By contrast, the governing elite and subsequently emperors in Rome were beyond the reach of the Arsacids, and the Parthians often had to settle for intervening in realms along the frontier that they shared with the Romans. Within a decade of Pompey's campaign, a proconsular governor of Syria, Aulus Gabinius, set the precedent of promoting a royal claimant in a civil war for kingship when he helped establish a royal claimant in Mesopotamia in 56–55. His actions enkindled hostilities that ultimately resulted in the famous destruction of Crassus's army in 53 (Overtoom 2021). Variations on such intervention in dynastic success and war would continue for centuries.

We have every reason to expect that residents of the Near East had varied responses to Pompey's campaign and its impact. Yet, in light of the political turbulence in the region for the prior hundred years, some people, very often those in Greek polities, conceived of Roman intervention as the best of all alternatives. One key sign of this is a fairly widespread tendency for polities to establish eras that reckoned time from Pompey's arrival in 64–63 or in the years immediately after (Seyrig 1950 with Rey-Coquais 1978, 45–46). These first and foremost reflect the local time reckoning of individual cities, but they point to a pattern by which local communities were orienting themselves toward Roman rule and to a certain extent promoting it as the protector of Greek civic life in the region. This arguably represents the first time that the region witnessed a vast departure from the extremely influential Seleucid calendar that reckoned time from 311 BC (on which, see Kosmin 2018). The cities that did this, if briefly, include Antioch, Apamaea, Arethusa, Tripolis, and a host of cities that Pompey removed from Hasmonaean control (Atkinson 2016, 47–133; Dąbrowa 2010, 67–93; Schwartz 2014, 51–52). In some instances, the new era did not take root for very long and gave way to the Seleucid era (again) or those defined by other key moments of Roman intervention in the Near East (like Caesar's arrival after defeating Pompey in 49); Antioch, for example, used it for only a few years after Pompey's arrival (Butcher 2003, 123). But reckonings of time based on Pompey's arrival were more enduring in south Syria where Greek polities retained memories of disenfranchisement under Hasmonaean rule and maintained hostilities against local Jewish communities.

Another effect, less frequently recognized but no less important, was Pompey's intervention in the way Greek polities included members of traditional Near Eastern populations into their citizen ranks, a practice that left an enduring legacy in the region (Andrade 2013). Previously, a peer network of self-defining Greek *poleis* had existed in the Levant under Seleucid and Ptolemaic rule. Their citizens overwhelmingly consisted of people who traced Greek or Graeco-Macedonian ancestry by patrilineal descent (even if they could also have ancestors from Near Eastern populations through intermarriage). But when Pompey arrived in the Levant, he encountered numerous Greek polities in south Syria that had been integrated into the Hasmonaean kingdom, whose inhabitants had experienced various amounts of disenfranchisement or destruction, and for which the local Jewish communities now constituted the governing population (Andrade 2010, 346–347 for significance; Atkinson 2016, 47–133; Dąbrowa 2010, 67–93 for overall context). In certain instances, Greek polities found themselves under the rule of local dynasts. According to Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 14.75–76; *BJ* 1.155–157), who may have overestimated the extent of Hasmonaean expansion (Schwartz 2014, 51–52; Atkinson 2016, 131–132), and the Byzantine chronographer Syncellus (559 and 565 in Mossham mer 1984, 355 and 359), Pompey restored these to the governance of their former inhabitants and even rebuilt them. The two sources specify Gadara, Hippos, Scythopolis, Pella, and Dion in south Syria; Gaza, Ioppa, Dora, and Strato's Tower in coastal Palestine; and Marissa, Ashdod, Iamnia, and Arethusa located more inland but still in proximity to the coastal strip. Their statements most plausibly refer to instances in which Pompey restored governance of such polities to local Greeks while severing them from the governance of the Hasmonaeans or minor dynasts and integrating them into the province of Syria. But when he restored civic hegemony to Greek populations in such cities, their citizen ranks began to integrate the descendants of Near Eastern population groups on a dramatically amplified scale. Such activities continued under the proconsular governor Gabinius in 57–55 (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.87–88; *BJ* 1.166), who had been one of Pompey's lieutenants during his campaign in the Levant, and Roman governance would make this a feature of Greek civic life in the Near East thereafter. In Palestine and areas of south Syria once controlled by the Hasmonaeans, Pompey played a pivotal role in transferring the governing hegemony of cities to local Greek populations from

Jewish ones, while organizing their citizen ranks along such lines. In celebration of this shift, many such polities dated their civic calendars according to their restoration by Pompey, though some did not mint such coins until a generation or two after Pompey's campaign (Kushnir-Stein 2005, 157–158 and Chancey 2004, 105–106).

Indeed, Pompey's promotion of Greek civic life had serious repercussions in greater Judaea and adjacent parts of south Syria (Andrade 2010, for the following). For the prior century, the Hasmonaeans had expanded their sway over Greek polities in coastal Palestine and Transjordan at the expense of Seleucid rule, along with the regions of Idumaea and the Galilee that became predominantly Jewish as a result (Atkinson 47–133; Dąbrowa 2010, 67–93; Schwartz 2014, 51–52). They defined their expanded state and its territory as Judaea (*ge Iudaea* or *'Eretz Yisrael*), a land governed by Jews. While it seems likely on the basis of Syncellus's independent testimony (15.558–59 in Mosshammer 1984, 355) that Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 13.395–397) overemphasizes the extent of the Hasmonaeans' expansion and the number of conquered cities (Atkinson 2016, 131–132), it remains clear that the Hasmonaeans conquered some Greek cities of coastal Palestine and Transjordan and remained a threat to others. Defining the cities that they had conquered as part of *'Eretz Yisrael* (*ge Iudaia*) in expansive terms, they defined Jews who had settled in them as their hegemonic civic populations. When Pompey and subsequently Gabinius intervened, they defined lesser Judaea, Idumaea, Peraea, and the Galilee as territory where Jews had civic hegemony. In coastal Palestine and in the "Decapolis," they restored the authority of Greek civic organs that increasingly integrated the members of Near Eastern ethnicities into the ranks of Greek citizenship. While enabling stability in the short term, such actions created local tensions that would be exacerbated by the transfer of any such cities to the control of the Herodian dynasts, who as Jewish kings had to govern the civic Greek and Jewish populations in them. Remaining unresolved for the next century, these shaped the contexts of localized violence that characterized the First Jewish Revolt and the years preceding it.

Finally, Pompey's impact on the relationship between Samaritans and Jews, though poorly documented, merits comment. During their period of expansion, the Hasmonaean dynasts had conquered Samaria and destroyed the Samaritan temple at Mt. Gerizim (Atkinson 2016, 69–78). When Pompey intervened in the region, he apparently opted to excise Samaria from Hasmonaean rule, embed it in the province of Syria, and promote the Samaritans as the governing community of cities and towns in the region (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.75–76; *BJ* 1.155–57), though it remains unclear to what extent the city of Samaria had a privileged Graeco-Macedonian population alongside a Samaritan one (Netzer 2006, 81). Either way, the region of Samaria would subsequently be governed by Herod I along with the Jewish heartland. Although he would refound the city of Samaria as Sebaste and settle polytheist veterans there (Netzer 2006, 81), he otherwise by all appearances upheld the expectations of Pompey and subsequently the governor Gabinius. During his reign, he ensured that Samaritans would have local governing authority over communities in Samaria independent of the Jewish priests of Jerusalem, and he perhaps even sharpened animosities between them (Schwartz 2014, 60–63).

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CHAPTER 14

THE IMPACT OF ROME IN THE NEAR EAST AFTER TH E BATTLE OF ACTIUM AND THE RISE OF HEROD

Politics and Art Intertwined

OLYMPIA BOBOU AND RUBINA RAJA

Historical Background

Gaius Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 BC did not pave the road for the strengthening of the republic (for the assassination, see Lintott 2009, with further reading; Cowan 2015). Instead, it led to a civil war between the two main conspirators against Caesar, Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus on one side, and two of Julius Caesar's most trusted commanders, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Mark Antony, and his nephew and adopted son Octavian on the other. At the end of the decisive battles at Philippi (42 BC), Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius (Pelling 1996, 5–8; Galinsky 2012, 42; see also Butera and Sears 2017; for Brutus, see Tempest 2017). Despite their apparent unity, the two men had been heads of rivaling factions since 44 BC; their rivalry continued after the Battle of Philippi, despite their physical distance: Mark Antony remained in the East while Octavian returned to Italy. Upon his return, Octavian divorced his first wife, Claudia, who was the daughter of Mark Antony's third wife Fulvia. This led to a civil war between forces raised by Fulvia on behalf of Mark Antony and Octavian, who was the ultimate victor. After Fulvia's death, the two men reconciled and Octavian gave his sister in marriage to Mark Antony as a visible sign of their alliance. Mark Antony, however, had begun an affair with Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, soon after they had met at Tarsus in 42 BC; the romantic relationship of the most powerful general of the Roman Republic at the time and the rich queen was also a de facto political alliance that took Mark Antony away from Roman interests and increased the threat he posed to Octavian. Despite attempts at reconciliation between the two men, some credited to Octavia, the Donations of Alexandria brought an end to any further possibility of reconciliation. In 34 BC, Mark Antony distributed lands, some belonging to Rome, others to their client kingdoms, others to Parthia, to his children by Cleopatra, and declared Caesarion, Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, Caesar's heir (for the donations, see Welch 2006/2007; Strootman 2010). He asked for these donations to be approved by the Roman senate, but they refused at the instigation of Octavian, whose source of power lay in his being Caesar's heir. The next two years saw a period of cold war, in which Mark Antony divorced Octavia and accused Octavian of forging Caesar's will, while Octavian accused Mark Antony of going to war without the senate's approval and keeping won lands as, essentially, his private property. In 32 BC, Octavian acquired a copy of Mark Antony's will: in it, Mark Antony called Caesarion Caesar's heir, made his children by Cleopatra his heirs, and stated his wish to be buried in Alexandria (for the will, see recently San Vicente 2021). These were all unacceptable wishes to the Roman senators, indicating to them that Mark Antony wanted to move the center of power to Alexandria, and so they took away his military power (*imperium*) and declared war on Cleopatra. Effectively, the war started in spring 31 BC, and culminated in a naval battle fought near the city of Actium, a Roman colony in Epirus on 2

September (for the years leading up to the Battle of Actium, see Pelling 1996, 1–54; Beacham 2005, 155–158; Freyburger-Galland 2009; Strauss 2022, 16–141).

The Battle of Actium

When the war started, Antony seemed to have the military and financial advantage: he had 500 ships (Plut., *Vit. Ant*. 6.1) and the seemingly limitless treasury of Egypt. Octavian, however, had at his side the experienced commander Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, who had already defeated the fleet of Sextus Pompeius at Naulochus in 36 BC. By the time the two fleets met outside Actium, Agrippa had already scored several victories against Mark Antony, capturing the naval bases of Methone, Patrae, and Corinth, thus cutting off the supply lines of Mark Antony. Octavian, for his own part, had captured Corcyra, then went across to Epirus and blocked Mark Antony's supply lines by land. A consequence of this blockade was that Mark Antony's men suffered from illness and malnutrition, or they had deserted to Octavian prior to the battle (Cass. Dio 50.15.3).

The battle itself took place on 2 September 31 BC. There are several accounts of it, as well as of the preparations for it, and they do not agree with each other. Regarding the number of ships, Florus (*Epit*. 2.21.5) and Orosius (6.19.8–9) give the advantage to Octavian, with 400 and 260 ships, respectively, compared to the fewer than 200 and 170 ships that Mark Antony had. Plutarch does not give the number of ships during the battle; he writes that at the beginning of the war, Mark Antony had 500 ships (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 61.1), while Octavian had 250 ships (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 61.2). Dio does not report on the number of ships but he gives the numerical advantage to Mark Antony's fleet (Cass. Dio 50.18.4 and 50.19.4). All the sources agree, however, that Mark Antony's ships were bigger, heavier, and less maneuverable than Octavian's. There is also disagreement in the sources as to which general commanded which side, with Plutarch giving the right wing to Mark Antony, the center to Marcus Octavius and Marcus Insteius, and the left to Publicola and Coelius (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 65.1); facing them were Agrippa on the left and Octavian on the right (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 65.2). Velleius Paterculus gives the following names as commanders: the right wing to Marcus Lurius, the left to Arruntius, while Agrippa had the overall command of the fleet. Octavian "was present everywhere" (Vell. Pat. 2.85.2). Other historians do not give the names of the commanders (Suet., *Aug*. 17.2; Cass. Dio 50.31; Flor., *Epit*. 2.21.11). Finally, even the aim of the battle is debated among the ancient writers. According to Dio, whose account (surviving only in a summary form) differs from that of other ancient writers, Mark Antony and Cleopatra did not fight to win but to escape Octavian's blockade. Since Dio is considered one of the most credible ancient historians, several modern historians have agreed with his view (see, for example, Reinhold 1986; Strauss 2022, 163; see Lange 2011 for an overview; see also Pitcher 2018 for the use of characterization in Cassius Dio).

Plutarch (*Vit. Ant.* 64–68) and Dio (50.13–34) give the most detailed descriptions of the battle, while the other historians give a very brief description (Suet., *Aug.* 17.2; Oros. 6.10–12; Flor., *Epit*. 2.21.5–8). The battle was also mentioned in poetry, but the value of the poems as historical sources is limited, although they reveal the impact of the battle (see mainly Hor., *Od.* 1.37.13; Hor., *Ep.* 9; Prop. 2.1, 2.15, 2.16, 2.34, 3.11, 4.6; see also Reitz-Joosse 2016; Tarrant 2020). Plutarch (*Vit. Ant.* 64.1), Dio (50.15.4), and Horace (*Od.* 1.37.13) agree that Mark Antony burned some of his ships before the battle (see also Tarn 1931, 184). Most of the sources also agree that the two fleets were arranged in a north–south direction, with Mark Antony's fleet close to the straits of the Actium gulf. His ships were placed closer to those of

Octavian, with Cleopatra's ships arranged behind his. It has been proposed that Mark Antony hoped to protect his flanks from an attack by staying close to the land (Strauss 2022, 167). At first, there was no wind and both fleets remained motionless; around midday, the situation changed: according to Plutarch, when the wind finally rose, the left wing of Mark Antony began its move; in response, Octavian's right wing retreated, wanting to draw out Mark Antony's ships and thus exploit any gaps in their formation (Plut., *Vit. Ant*. 65.5).

The first stages of the battle resembled a siege: Plutarch and Dio both comment on the swiftness of Octavian's smaller ships, and how several of them attacked Mark Antony's heavier vessels. Conventional weapons, like arrows and spears, were used by the men on both sides. Mark Antony's men also used heavy war machinery. Plutarch and Dio both report how his men attacked with stones thrown by catapults (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 66.2; Cass. Dio 50.32.5). Another war machine used by Mark Antony was the "iron hand" (Cass. Dio.50.32.5). This was perhaps a variation of Archimedes's defense machine (Strauss 2022, 173, understands it as "a grappling iron with hooks"; see Pol. 8.6.1–6; Liv. 24.34.10–12; Plut., *Vit. Marc*. 15.2–3 for descriptions; R orres 2001; Young 2004 for modern attempts at reconstruction). In retaliation, Octavian's men used "fiery missiles" (Plut., *Vit. Ant*. 66.2). These were arrows that were drenched in flammable materials that were set alight before being shot, torches tied on javelins, or clay pots filled with flammable materials (Cass. Dio 50.34.2; see also Mayor 2022, 223–238). In the middle of this fierce battle, when the result was still in the balance, Cleopatra saw an opening between the combatants and sailed away (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 66.3; Cass. Dio 50.33. 1–2). Mark Antony followed her (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 66.5; Cass. Dio 50.33.3) and, when aboard her ship, he "sat down by himself in silence, holding his head in both hands" (Plut., *Vit*. *Ant*. 67.1; Dio does not speculate or write about Mark Antony being taken on board by Cleopatra, but he writes about his motivation for fleeing: Cass. Dio 50.33.3). The battle continued for a few more hours: Dio describes the pitched battle with the use of the war machines and the different types of fire missiles as taking place after Mark Antony and Cleopatra escaped (Cass. Dio 50.34)—another point of divergence between the two most detailed sources (fig. 14.1).

FIGURE 14.1. Relief with sea battle, collection of Dukes of Cardona, Cordoba. Image © Jose Lucas/Alamy Stock Photo.

The Aftermath

The end of the battle found Octavian the winner. After his victory, he founded a city at the site of his camp, Nikopolis, and set up a trophy monument on its outskirts (Murray 1996; Zachos 2001; 2003). He also enlarged the temple of Apollo and dedicated ten captured ships, one from each class in Mark Antony's fleet, and instituted games commemorating his victory (Str. 7.7.6). Mark Antony and Cleopatra returned to Egypt, while Octavian remained in Greece, sending Agrippa to Italy to deal with possible unrest among the veterans (Cass. Dio 51.3).

According to Dio, over the course of the following months, the two opponents gathered their forces. Octavian hurried between Asia Minor and Italy to deal with disgruntled veterans and Romans himself (Cass. Dio 51.4), while Mark Antony and Cleopatra asked for help from their allies (Cass. Dio 51.5) and, at the same time, tried to negotiate with Octavian (Cass. Dio 51.6.5–6, 51.8, 51.9.5–6). Plutarch, however, gives a different account: in his narrative, Mark Antony wanted to retire from public life, while Cleopatra engaged in negotiations with Octavian (Plut., *Vit. Ant.* 69, 71–72). Octavian finally moved against Egypt; he captured the city of Pelusium and despite a defeat outside Alexandria, his men rallied and defeated Mark Antony. Dio writes that he was then betrayed by Cleopatra, who hoped to gain Octavian's favor, and committed suicide (Cass. Dio 51.10). When Cleopatra realized that Octavian meant to take her to Rome and display her in his triumphal procession, she also killed herself (Cass. Dio 51.11–14).

Her death meant that the entire Mediterranean basin was now under Roman control, either directly or indirectly through the services of client kings. One such king was Herod of Judaea. His family had friendly connections with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony among others (Jos., *BI*

180, 193–194, 244), and, since being appointed governor of Galilee in his youth (Jos., *BI* 201), Herod had proven himself a man of valor and decisiveness. Therefore, it was no surprise that Mark Antony had appointed him governor of one of the four administrative regions of Judaea in 41 bc (Jos., *BI* 243), a state nominally ruled by the ethnarch Hyrcanus II. When Antigonus II took control of Judaea, Herod fled to Rome, where Mark Antony and Octavian persuaded the senate to grant him the title of king (Jos., *BI* 280–285). Herod returned to Judaea, ultimately defeating Antigonus II, with help from Mark Antony's legions, and securing his rule.

When the forces of Octavian and Mark Antony began gathering in preparation for the war that would lead to the Battle of Actium, Herod offered his support to his benefactor Mark Antony. According to Josephus, Cleopatra persuaded Mark Antony to send Herod to fight the Nabateans (Jos., *BI* 364; Millar 1993, 28–29). This war, as well as dealing with an earthquake, kept Herod away from Actium (*contra* Plut., *Vit. Ant*. 61.2). When news of Mark Antony's defeat reached him, Herod went to Rhodes, where he made a dramatic appeal to Octavian for mercy (Jos., *BI* 386–390; see also Erskine 1991, 274). Octavian showed himself merciful and generous, giving Herod back his crown and adding several lands to his kingdom (Jos., *BI* 391–399; Millar 1993, 30–31) (fig. 14.2).

FIGURE 14.2. Bust of Augustus, following the Prima Porta type. Possibly from Fayum. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. no. 1443. Image © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Syria and the Near East after the Battle of Actium

In the years following the Battle of Actium, Octavian became the sole ruler of the rapidly developing territory of the Roman world and effectively ended the Roman Republic, even though it continued to exist in name (Galinsky 2012, 61–83). This initiated a period described as *pax romana* (see recently Cornwell 2017). While peace was never absolute and there was internal unrest as well as wars at the borders of the Empire, the area of the Mediterranean basin and Western Europe for the most part had a period of stability that generated prosperity. The area of the Levant and the Near East, in particular, benefited the most from the political stability and from the trade routes that connected Rome to Parthia, India, and China (Kolb and Speidel 2016; Schäffer 2016; Broekaert 2017; Cornwell 2017, 187–200; Schörle 2017).

Herod's Building Projects

Octavian was generally merciful to Mark Antony's client kings and generous to those who acknowledged his victory (Millar 1993, 29; Sartre 2021, 14). Herod, however, was one of the more unlikely winners of the Battle of Actium. While ruling as a client king of the Romans in a period of peace meant that his kingdom was safe from external threats (the war with the Nabateans notwithstanding and initiated by Herod, to Augustus's displeasure: Netzer 2006, 14–15), his rule was plagued by internal strife and discontent among his extended family members, the elites, and the Jewish people that led to attempts at assassination, coups, and revolt. Despite all that, Herod ruled Judaea until his death in 4 BC, and was perhaps the most prolific builder and city founder of all the client kings of the early principate (this is the traditional chronology; see Mahieu 2012 for a reevaluation, *contra* Sievers 2014 and Grabbe 2020, 29–31; for the life of Herod, see the still relevant monographs by Otto [1913] and Schalit [1969] and the recent monograph by Richardson and Fisher [2017]).

During his lifetime, he initiated a number of building projects that transformed his kingdom (for the most succinct survey of these, see Lichtenberger 1999, 176–178; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 236–242). Before 31 BC, Herod had been involved in the renovation of fortresses (Richardson and Fisher 2017, 236–237), but only after the Battle of Actium did he become the most prolific instigator of buildings in Judaea's history and one who could compete with Hellenistic kings in the scale of his building projects. Even though there are debates about the precise chronology of most of the buildings, and in some cases, the extent of Herodian intervention (for example, did he build or did he renovate the Antonia fortress as Josephus [*BI* 401] wrote? See, among others, Murphy-O'Connor 2004, 79 n. 3; Bahat 2015; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 243–244), it is possible to group his buildings after the Battle of Actium into two phases: one of mainly palaces and fortresses, and one of continuation of building and of constructing buildings that would leave a lasting memory (Lichtenberger 176–178), based on intentions: consolidation of power and commemoration (Richardson and Fisher 2017, 237–242), or based on function: palaces, public buildings (including religious structures), and fortresses (Netzer 2006, 303). These groupings already give a sense of the scale and types of building projects he initiated. In addition to these, Herod also founded several cities: two were named after his parents Antipater and Kypros (Jos., *BI* 1.417; Lichtenberger 1999, 71–73; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 255), but the most famous (and best known) was founded to honor his new patron: Caesarea Maritima (see Raban and Holum 1996; Lichtenberger 1999, 116–130; Netzer 2006, 94–118; Ra

ban 2009; Patrich 2011). The most ambitious of these projects, however, was the restoration and enlargement of the Temple in Jerusalem. This was the most significant and symbolically charged of all the buildings that Herod initiated (Jos., *BI* 401). Josephus (*Ant. Iud.* 15.11) wrote that Herod thought this would be the best memorial for him, and described its planning and building in detail; because of the historical-religious significance of the site and the few archaeological remains, his account remains crucial in discussions and reconstructions of the Herodian temple. The building was entirely made of white stone and had several courtyards to which entrance was strictly regulated on penalty of death to non-Jewish trespassers (for the warning inscriptions see: Clermont-Ganneau 1871; Illife 1936; Bickerman 1947; Llewelyn and v an Beek 2011; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 301; for the Temple, see Lichtenberger 1999, 131–142; of primary importance is Netzer 2006, 137–178; see also Patrich 2009; Goldhill 2011, 57–80; Mazar 2012; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 276–278). It was not finished during Herod's lifetime: construction continued until ad 63 (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 20.219), and it was destroyed by the Romans in ad 70 (see recently Rosenstein 2018, 113–125 for a good introduction to the Revolt of ad 66 and its aftermath; see also Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume).

What is even more difficult to establish than the chronology of his buildings is Herod's own intentions and how they related to his politics and concept of kingship. In fact, until recently, scholarship had been dominated by two main schools of thought on the matter: one sees Herod as a Hellenistic king-benefactor, that is, a founder of cities, patron of sanctuaries and civic institutions, and conservator interested in embellishing, enlarging, or creating palaces, and the other as a client king eager to imitate and ingratiate himself to the Romans, especially Augustus (for a useful summary with references to the major supporters of each theory, see Pel eg-Barkat 2021, 410–411; see also Jacobson 1988; Lichtenberger 2009). Scholarship from the 2010s, however, reflects a new trend that sees Herod as a complex individual, who had different "identities" or "facets," that he used effectively to navigate internal and external politics (see Baltrusch 2012; Marshak 2015; Richardson and Fisher 2017; Peleg-Barkat 2021). This aligns with the reevaluation of the historical sources and the apparent contradictions in Josephus's appraisal of Herod between the earlier *Jewish War* and the later *Antiquities of the Jews* (for that, see esp. Czajkowski and Eckhardt 2021; see also Rajak 2007; van Henten 201 6).

The evidence from the literary sources and the excavations of Herodian structures and cities points to this complexity. While the most obvious—and controversial for Herod's Jewish subjects—was the placing of a golden eagle over the great gate of the Temple (Jos., *BI* 1.650; Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 17.149), his cities, palaces, and other buildings also demonstrated this blending of local and international elements, sometimes in unexpected and unprecedented ways. One such example is the multipurpose, civic complex in Jericho: it combined a hippodrome, a theater, and a gymnasium in a single monumental structure (Netzer 2006, 72–80; Peleg-Barkat 2021, 417). Another is the construction of three temples to Augustus and Roma, one in Caesarea Maritima, one in Samaria-Sebaste, and one near Panias (see Netzer 2006, 270–273; Richardson and Fisher 2017, 273–274; see also Burrell 2020). Herod has also been credited as being the first to introduce theaters (Segal 1985/1988, 146; Netzer 2006, 277–281; *contra*, see Peleg-Barkat 2021, 416) and bathing complexes in Judaea (Kowalewska 2021, xvi; *contra* Peleg -Barkat 2021, 416; see Netzer 2006, 293–294 for a concise summary of all the "Roman-style" buildings by Herod; see also Patrich 2009).

Materials, forms, and decorations also show how Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions could coexist in single Herodian buildings. These can be observed in the first building phase of his palace-fortress in Masada: it included a bath house that, depending on the scholar discussing it, is either a purely Greek-style bath house (Hoss 2005, 40–42) or a combination of a Greek-style bathroom with a ritual purity Jewish stepped bath (Netzer 2006, 21), as well as mosaics,

some of which can be compared to Hellenistic examples in Delos (Hachlili 2009, 11–13). Their floral decoration has been interpreted as a deliberate choice compliant with Jewish tradition (Dunbabin 1999, 187). The painted wall decorations from the same palace range from imitations of blocks in stucco to painted imitations of marble revetment panels (following the first, or "Masonry" style, and the second Pompeian style of wall painting: for an introduction to these, see Ling 1991, 12–51; for the paintings at Masada, see Netzer 2006, 17–41 in passim; Foerster 2007; Rozenberg 2014, 120; for the palace at Masada, see Lichtenberger 1999, 21–34; Netzer 2006, 17–41; Kropp 2013, 120–127). In an annex to the Small Theater that belonged to a building identified as his mausoleum (the Herodium, thus Netzer 2006, 179–201; the members of his team, like Rozenberg and Peleg-Barkat also agree with the identification; *contra* Patrich and Arubas 2015), however, Herod seems to have moved away from strictly aniconic decorations, as there are several paintings with figures, including one with a warship, and the style of the paintings is closer to the later examples of the second style of Pompeian painting, indicating that he was familiar with what was fashionable in Rome (see Rozenberg 2008 in passim; 2009; 2014). It has been suggested that these paintings may have been especially made in anticipation of Agrippa's visit in 15 bc (Rozenberg 2014, 127). This building, though, seems to be an exception to the rule of using aniconic decoration in the palaces (see also Peleg-Barkat 2014; 2021, 423–432).

Thus, Herod's building projects showed how he balanced his identity as an Idumean-Jew, who was familiar with Greek and Roman culture. He was a king whose public works were made for the benefit of his people, a friend to the Roman emperors declaring his allegiance through the construction of temples to Augustus and Roma, and a super-wealthy patron who had to have the best that the Roman Empire and Judaea could offer (alongside the references above, see also Rocca 2008, 19–63). They show how Greek and Roman culture became elite culture and, through his patronage, became diffused in Judaea (see, for example, the multiplication of shrines to Greek, Roman, and other deities after Herod: Ovadiah and Turnheim 2011), but also how regional, especially in terms of techniques and craftsmanship, and religious traditions, such as aniconism, balanced out the deliberate "Hellenization" and "Roman-style" forms, decorations, and buildings (see also Kamash 2012, 88, for another example of Herod's complexity). Similar cultural accommodation and blending of traditions can be seen in the material culture of Palmyra, Petra, and later, in the Decapolis, all of which would not have been possible without the period of general peace and prosperity inaugurated after the Battle of Actium.

Herod's influence on the art, architecture, and economy of the region was also immense: first, the construction of the Temple that continued until ad 63, meant that thousands of people were employed in the project, and all these people generated trade and stimulated the economy of Jerusalem. Josephus writes that when the Temple was finished, their unemployment created a huge problem, and Herod Agrippa solved it by starting work on the cloisters on the outer walls of the Temple Mount (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 20.9.7). So, at the most basic level, Herod's building program changed the size and population of Jerusalem (Reich 2014). His buildings also necessitated technical innovations both for the exploitation of natural resources and their construction (Netzer 2006, 306–319). They also created a new visual culture: in architecture (see mainly Peleg 2006), wall paintings (Rozenberg 2006a; 2006b), and mosaics (Talgam and Peleg 2006). All these new techniques, materials, motifs, and objects influenced largely the elites of Judaea. A culture of conspicuous consumption and display can be observed through the archaeological finds and testifies to the impact of Herodian visual culture and lifestyle (see Hirschfeld 2007; Burrell 2014; Berlin 2014; Kahn 2014).

From the neighboring client kingdom of Emesa in this period, only a golden signet ring remains (Kropp 2013, 80–83), as well as the documentation on the tomb of C. Iulius Samsigeramos, that was destroyed in 1911. The tomb, a free-standing structure on a podium with a vaulted room and a pyramidal roof, was constructed in *opus caementicium* and its exterior in *opus raeticulatum*. While these were Roman technical features and the exterior was also articulated with the use of Doric pilasters, the decoration referred back to local architectural traditions. The tomb most likely belonged to a member of the local dynasty rather than a king, and the use of the typical Roman name in the Greek funerary inscription recording the construction of the tomb, together with local decorative forms, shows that the monument was a simultaneous expression of loyalty to Rome and to Emesa (for the two building techniques, see Yegül and Favro 2019, 134–139, with previous bibliography; for the tomb, see Kropp 2013, 208–213; Konrad 2017, with previous bibliography). Similarly to Emesa, most of the evidence for the artistic production of Iturea in this period is on coinage. The portraits of the local kings show their awareness of the Roman veristic tradition, and how they actively used it as a statement of political allegiance (Kropp 2013, 78–81).

The only other client kingdom, apart from Judaea, whose material remains can offer evidence of the impact of the presence of Rome in the region is that of Nabatea. King Malikhos I (r. 59–30 bc) was an ally of Herod and Mark Antony, and, like Herod, he was also not punished for his allegiance to Mark Antony but remained on his throne. From his reign onward, the Nabateans aligned themselves with the Romans and kept their independence until ad 106 (for a historical overview of the kingdom, see Taylor 2002; see also Healey 2001; Politis 2007; Kropp 2013, 42–43 with previous bibliography). The Nabateans profited from their friendly relations with the Romans and their desire for luxury goods from Arabia Felix and further east, such as incense (see Erickson-Gini and Israel 2013; Terpstra 2015; Kolb and Speidel 2016).

The capital Petra is perhaps the city where the architecture reveals the close connections between the Nabatean rulers and elites and the east Mediterranean. The earliest of the tombs date from the end of the first century bc (McKenzie 1990, 40–41, 49, 51; Kropp 2013, 204), and their architecture has clear influences from that of Alexandria, either through direct parallels or through the echoes of palatial architecture seen in Pompeian second-style wall paintings (see esp. McKenzie 1990, 85–104; Kropp 2013, 199–205) (fig. 14.3).

FIGURE 14.3. Petra, Qasr-el-Bint, perhaps the earliest tomb at the site. Image © MW-MaA/Manar al-Athar.

Alexandria was one of the leading artistic centers of the Hellenistic world. For the Romans, before its conquest, it was synonymous with excessive luxury, and afterward it retained the allure of the exotic (see Bricault, Versluys, and Meyboom 2006; Maehler 2016; Walker 2016; Pearson 2021). The close political connections between Nabatean kings and the Ptolemies probably also influenced their decision to use decorative and architectural models from Alexandria. Other tombs, however, show influences from the region as well as the development of distinctive techniques (Tholbecq 2007; see also Tholbecq, chapter 24, this volume).

The caravan city of Palmyra is another case where the impact of Rome can be seen in the architecture and iconography, although far stronger is the influence of local tradition in Palmyrene arts (see Bobou, chapter 35, this volume). From the second century AD, the impact of Rome can also be seen far more clearly in the Decapolis (see Bobou and Raja, chapter 43, this volume), although, at least in the earliest wall paintings from Gerasa, it is possible to detect the impact of Herodian preference for aniconism (see Thomsen 2022, 229).

Concluding Remarks: Paving the Way for the Empire

The Battle of Actium was undoubtedly one of the most important events that took place in the Mediterranean basin. Although Rome had been expanding its influence and territories for almost two hundred years before it, the battle marked the end of the republic and established Octavian as sole ruler. Politically, the lands of Syria and the Near East were divided between imperial provinces and client kingdoms. Thanks to all of Herod's buildings and cities, the impact

of Roman and Greek artistic traditions and the use of local traditions is easier to trace and follow in Judaea. From the surviving evidence, it is clear that Herod made use of the resources of his kingdom in order to show his loyalty to Octavian and Rome through his buildings. At the same time, his most important work was one that addressed directly his Jewish subjects, while the lack of figural decoration in most of his buildings also proclaimed him as a devout Jew (Lichtenberger 1999). Other client kings in the region, however, do not seem to have engaged in such massive building projects, with the exception of the Nabateans. So while not easily directly discernible, the time after the Battle of Actium did indeed have an influence on artistic traditions in not least the region that was under the control of Herod, where his building and decorational programs underline the close connection to the center of what was to become an empire ruled by one man. Quite literally, Herod paved, cemented, and constructed the way for Octavian/Augustus in this part of the region and his works changed the urban landscape first of Judaea and then in the rest of Syria and the Near East.

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CHAPTER 15

ROMAN COLONIES IN THE NEAR EAST

JULIEN ALIQUOT

We owe to Ulpian, the famous lawyer from Tyre, a valuable record of the colonies (*coloniae*) founded in the provinces of the Roman Near East between the Augustan age and the time of the Severi. This description appears in the first book of the treatise *On Censuses*, written in AD 213 and partly preserved in Justinian's *Digest*. It is as much a tribute paid by the lawyer to his Phoenician homeland as it is a listing of the main cities that enjoyed colonial status under the reign of Caracalla (*Dig.*, 50.15.1.1–7):

> One must realize that there are some colonies with *ius Italicum*, as, in Syria Phoenice, the most splendid colony of the Tyrians, which is my place of origin, outstanding in its territories, of very ancient foundation, powerful in war, always loyal to the treaty it made with the Romans; for the divine Severus and our emperor granted it *ius Italicum* because of its great and conspicuous faithfulness towards the Roman state and empire. But the colony of Berytus, also in the same province, was raised up by favour of Augustus and is, as the divine Hadrian says in a speech, an Augustan colony which possesses *ius Italicum*. There is also the colony of Heliopolis, which received from the divine Severus on the occasion of the civil war the status of an Italian colony. There is also the colony of Laodicea in Coele Syria to which the divine Severus granted *ius Italicum* because of its services in civil war. Indeed, the colony of Ptolemais, which lies between Phoenice and Palestine, has nothing but the name of a colony. But our emperor also gave the status of colony to the city of Emesa in Phoenice and conferred the *ius Italicum* on it. There is also the city of Palmyra in the province of Phoenice, located near the peoples and nations of the barbarians. In Palestine there were two colonies, Caesarea and Aelia Capitolina, but neither has the *ius Italicum*. The divine Severus also founded a colony in the city of Sebaste. (Translation adapted from Watson 1998, 4:445)

Here, one can feel the pride of cities favored one after the other by the emperors and honored, at least for the most privileged among them, by the granting of the highly coveted *ius Italicum*, which covered a set of privileges (including exemption of *tributum capitis* and *tributum soli*, i.e., poll- and land-tax) conferred through a special law (*lex data*) whereby provincial communities acquired the legal status of Italian cities as developed during the last century of the Roman Republic (Sherwin-White 1973, 276–277, 316–322). We also find that there was a hierarchy of colonies involved in the search for honors and privileges that characterized civic life in the whole empire as in the provincial area that eventually extended from the Levantine coast to Mesopotamia and from Commagene to Palestine and Arabia (on the overall context: Millar 1993; Isaac 1993; Butcher 2003; Sartre 2005).

Ulpian, however, remained rooted in an era, that of the advent of universal citizenship under the Severi, and understandably his account only partially reflects Roman colonization. In what follows, this phenomenon will be presented more thoroughly, from its origins, in the city of Berytus under Augustus, to its latest reminiscences in the Christian empire of Byzantium and beyond. After the classic studies by Fergus Millar (1990) and Maurice Sartre (2001), the collection of available data will take advantage of the progress of epigraphy (*CIIP*, *IGLS*) and numismatics (*RPC*) in the Near East. The updating of their interpretation can build on the most recent historical work on the Roman colonies that flourished in the Hellenized part of the empire (e.g., Salmeri, Raggi, and Baroni 2004; Brélaz 2017). The focus will be on the major changes introduced by the establishment (or *deductio*) of Roman citizens on the territories of

pre-existing communities. Special attention will also be paid to the integration of the *coloniae* into their Greek and Semitic cultural environment.

Berytus: A Little Rome in the East

At the time when Rome had just supplanted the Seleucids in the Near East, nothing predisposed Berytus (now Beirut, in present-day Lebanon) to play a specific role in the province of Syria created by Pompey in 64–63 BC (Mouterde 1964; Hall 2004; *IGLS* VIII/1). Although it had managed to score points over its neighbors within the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Phoenician city had been affected by a violent siege in 143 BC, before being subjected to raids led by the Ituraeans. The civil wars at the end of the Roman Republic also caused unrest in its surroundings as in the whole East for some thirty years. From 27 BC, however, the advent of Augustus opened the way to the establishment at Berytus of the first Roman colony in Syria. The decision of the first emperor could not be the result of his desire to favor the Phoenicians of Berytus, who had no choice but to be collectively assimilated to simple residents (*incolae*) and to welcome on their soil colonists (*coloni*) from two legions, the V Macedonica and the VIII Gallica. Rather, it was to stop the endemic robbery in Lebanon by distributing parcels of land to the faithful victory makers of Actium (see Sawaya 2009, 198, for Berytian coins with legionary numbers on standards, and Aliquot and Yon 2016, 153, no. 5 = *IGLS* VIII/1, 185, with a Latin epitaph of a legionnaire from the eighth legion).

In 15 bc, Augustus's son-in-law M. Vipsanius Agrippa extended the territory of Berytus in the Bekaa Valley, around the great sanctuary of Heliopolis (Baalbek) and to the sources of the Orontes River (Str., *Geog*. 16.2.19). This measure was subsequently considered in collective memory as the true founding act of the new Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus (Aliquot 2019a, 337–338). The colony soon became a little Rome in the Near East and a Latin island in a Graeco-Aramaic environment, without, however, preventing local traditions from thriving in a renewed setting, particularly at Heliopolis, Dayr al-Qalaa, Niha, and in the other sanctuaries of its territory (Aliquot 2009). By taking up the words of the poet Juvenal, who lamented that the Syrian Orontes flowed into the Tiber to describe the contamination of Rome by the mores and lust of Antioch at the beginning of the second century ad (*Saturae* 3.62: "iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes"), we can say that the Tiber definitely irrigated Berytus under the empire (fig. 15.1).

FIGURE 15.1. Berytus: statue base inscribed in Latin and erected in honor of M. Sentius Proculus, a Roman senator from Berytus, former duumvir and patron of the colony, during the reign of Hadrian (117–138), National Museum, Beirut, inv. no. 26252. © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma, IGLS Archive 2019.

Eventually rewarded with the *ius Italicum* and therefore statutorily exempt from tribute, Berytus was also a center for the display and deposit of imperial constitutions from which its law school emerged. Its civic institutions were now shaped according to a Roman model, with a pair of highest magistrates (*duumviri*) as equivalent of consuls, a council of decurions (*ordo decurionum*) gathered in assembly like senators, quaestors in charge of internal finances, or *pontifices*, *flamines*, and *seviri* to assume public priesthoods. The citizens who made up its *populus* were enrolled in the tribe Fabia. Its territory was divided into *pagi* and *vici*. At the same time, the name of Berytus radiated throughout the Roman world. The colony supplied many recruits to the empire, as well as hundreds of soldiers to fight alongside the legions in Judaea, first during the reign of Augustus, perhaps as a result of a mobilization of former veterans, and then again during the First Jewish War, as soon as the revolt broke out in ad 66. Its merchants now exported local products (wine, purple, glass, silk) by maritime trade to the West, thus perpetuating the tradition inaugurated by the traders, shipowners, and warehouse-keepers of the religious association of the Poseidoniasts of Berytus established in Delos during the Hellenistic period. Berytian scholars, such as the Latin grammarian M. Valerius Probus, in the second half of the first century ad, and the Greek philosopher L. Calvinus Taurus, in the next century, earned the esteem of their contemporaries all the way to Rome. The public cults of the city spread from Britain to the Euphrates, especially that of the Heliopolitan triad (Jupiter, Venus, Mercury). Agonistic epigraphy further shows that Berytus held its own Greek-style festival in the second century ad and that the gymnastic, equestrian, and musical events organized on this occasion were as famous as the games of Antioch, Tyre, and Sidon.

In the early empire, the colony developed through the generous (and of course not disinterested) initiatives of wealthy citizens and foreign benefactors. King Herod the Great and his heirs were the most generous donors in that respect. The list of their gifts, as summarized by Flavius Josephus (*BI* 1.422; *Ant. Jud.* 19.335–337; 20.211–212), draws attention to the introduction of Roman architecture and shows in Phoenicia. Herod himself endowed the city with a series of buildings worthy of the most prestigious Greek cities (exedrae, porticos, temples, public places). Agrippa I then gave baths and porticos to Berytus, as well as a theater and an amphitheater where he offered musical events and gladiatorial shows in the western style. Finally, Agrippa II made such splendid gifts (annual shows, wheat, oil, statues) that his subjects soon felt hatred toward him and jealousy toward the colony.

Even the emperors sponsored the colony. Vespasian and Hadrian accepted the title of honorary duumvir at Berytus. Trajan consulted the oracle of Heliopolis before going to war with the Parthians. The idyll between Rome and the city was only compromised when Septimius Severus reorganized the Orient in ad 193–194 after his victory over Pescennius Niger. Berytus, which had sided with Niger, lost its territory around Heliopolis in the Bekaa Valley and was included in the new province of Syria Phoenice, whose capital was Tyre, its great rival. The partition of Syria Phoenice at the end of the fourth century ad did not alter the balance of power, since Tyre was both the administrative head and the ecclesiastical metropolis of Phoenice Maritima, where Berytus was also located.

Late antiquity was nonetheless a new golden age in Berytus (Aliquot 2015a). The city, once converted to the Christian faith, saw many churches built within its walls. In addition to the Anastasia Cathedral and the church of the Theotokos (Mother of God), it hosted two martyria, one devoted to the cult of St. Jude, the "brother" of Jesus, and the other to St. Stephen, the

first martyr. Although it was devoid of any ancient apostolic tradition, Berytus became autonomous by allying sometimes with the patriarch of Antioch and sometimes with the patriarch of Jerusalem against the metropolitan of Tyre. Bishop Eustathios eventually obtained juridical independence for his city and the title of honorary metropolitan for himself and his successors in ad 449–451. The city then took on the rare and unofficial Greek title of "beautiful city" (καλλίπολις), like Jerusalem.

In the middle of the third century at the latest, the flowering of Latin letters in Berytus and the privileged status of the colony had fostered the emergence of a school around a core of jurists capable of interpreting Graeco-Roman jurisprudence and local laws alike (Collinet 1925; Aliquot 2015b). From there, imperial legislation spread throughout the East until late antiquity. As a "nurse of laws" (*legum nutrix*), the city supplanted not only Tyre, the homeland of Ulpian, but also Caesarea Maritima, Alexandria, Athens, and even both other cities where the emperor Justinian (527–565) later left similar institutions: Rome and Constantinople. The law school prospered at Berytus until the earthquake of ad 551, followed by a devastating tsunami that destroyed the city and forced teachers and students to flee, first to Sidon and then to Constantinople.

Other Early Colonies and the Military in and around Judaea

After Berytus, only three cities were granted the status of Roman colonies in the Near East until the time of the Severi: Ptolemais (Akko) in the province of Syria, Caesarea Maritima and Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) in the provinces of Judaea and Syria Palaestina. What they all have in common is that they were founded in contact with the hotbed of perpetual unrest that Judaea was in the first and early second centuries AD (Eck 2007).

Toward the end of his reign, the emperor Claudius (ad 41–54) founded the Colonia Claudia Stabilis Germanicia Felix Ptolemais and dispatched veterans from four legions (III, VI, X, and XI) to this former Phoenician city (Burnett, Amandry, and Ripollès 1992, 659). Very little is known about the colony, but the division of its territory into *pagi* and *vici* seems certain, as well as the existence of a priest of Jupiter (*flamen Dialis*) who was probably assigned to the cult of Jupiter Heliopolitanus (Arubas, Di Segni, and Foerster 2018). Ptolemais continued to mint coins with Latin legends until the middle of the third century ad, which at least proves the attachment of its citizens to traditions inherited from the Julio-Claudian period. Given the lack of sources, it remains difficult to understand why Ulpian claimed that the city had only the name of a colony under Caracalla. It is possible that Ptolemais did not enjoy the *ius Italicum* or that it had lost some privileges since its foundation.

In neighboring Judaea, Caesarea Maritima and Jerusalem are quite different cases, although here again the installation of veterans is likely. Just before becoming a colony at the end of the First Jewish Revolt (ad 66–70), Caesarea already was a major Hellenized port city and the capital of a province with a strong military presence (Eck 2021). Excavations at the site have revealed a large complex that served successively as a royal palace of the Herods, as the seat of the Roman prefects of Judaea, and as the residence of the senatorial legates of Judaea and Syria Palaestina (and later of the governors of Palaestina Prima). The city also hosted the financial procurators of the province. At the beginning of the First Jewish Revolt, it provided the army of Vespasian with no less than five *cohortes* and one *ala* (Jos., *BI* 3.66). Around ad 71, it was called Colonia Prima Flavia Augusta Caesarea, perhaps because it was the place where Vespasian had been first proclaimed *imperator* two years earlier. There is no clear evidence of an installation of veterans contemporary with the founding of the colony and deliberately

decided by the Roman authorities (see the conflicting opinions of Eck 2009, 34–40, and Isaac 2009, 55–60, and 2017, 332–341). However, this seems likely, especially since the local epigraphy proves the fairly widespread use of both Latin and Greek by the colonial upper class during the first three centuries ad (Ameling et al. 2011). Serving or retired soldiers and officers also used Latin there. Some of them may have belonged to a group of veterans settled in the colony. Others may have chosen either to settle here on their own or to have come back on their native lands after being stationed in the provincial garrisons, especially in the nearby legionary bases at Legio-Caparcotna and Jerusalem. The *Digest* (50.15.8.7) mentions that Caesarea did not receive the *ius Italicum*, but that it was only gradually awarded financial advantages associated with this status (remission of *tributum capitis* under Vespasian, extended by Titus to full territorial immunity). This may be because the presence of governors would not have been fully compatible with the higher degree of autonomy expected from the Italian status.

During the First Jewish Revolt, Titus's troops systematically destroyed Jerusalem after an implacable siege, in ad 70. As a result, while eight hundred veterans were settled at Emmaus, the town itself became the seat of the Legio X Fretensis, and it remained so until the legion left Jerusalem for Aila in Provincia Arabia, in the second half of the third century or the beginning of the fourth century ad. The presence of a Roman military unit in a ruined city was unprecedented. In the second half of his reign, Hadrian (ad 117–138) solved this unusual case by founding the Colonia Aelia Capitolina at Jerusalem. His decision is often considered to be the trigger for the Second Jewish Revolt (ad 132–135), as suggested by Cassius Dio (69.12.1–2). However, the foundation cannot be dated more precisely than between ad 128 and 138, according to numismatic evidence (Amandry and Burnett 2015, 516–517). Whatever the solution to this still much debated issue, the name of the colony surely referred both to the emperor's *nomen gentilicium Aelius* and to the Capitoline triad, whose members (Jupiter, Minerva, Juno) were depicted in the same temple on Hadrianic coins, along with other images evocative of colonial foundation (plowing scene) and legionary presence, if not of formal installation of veterans on the site (legionary eagles, galley and boar of the tenth legion). Aelia Capitolina, as it emerged from the rubble of Jerusalem, was a second-rank and rather isolated settlement in Syria Palaestina from the second to the fourth centuries ad, although it seemingly benefited from the same economic advantages as Caesarea. It was only in late antiquity that it really developed, as the holy city of Christianity (Cotton et al. 2010–2012; Isaac 2017, 341–343).

A Colonial Explosion under the Severi

The last movement of colonial foundations was initiated on a much larger scale by Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) before coming to an end around the middle of the third century. This phenomenon affected the Near East and Mesopotamia more than any other region of the empire. Its origins belong to the history of the civil war of the years AD 193–194 as much as to the history of the Severan dynasty. At least three cities (Heliopolis and Tyre in Syria Phoenice, Laodicea in Coele Syria) obtained from Severus the status of Roman colonies and the *ius Italicum* as a reward for their support during the conflict against Pescennius Niger, while their neighbors and rivals were punished for their defection.

In ad 194, when Severus arrived in the Near East for the first time, Heliopolis was definitely separated from Berytus and given the name of Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis. As a result, its citizens did not fail to claim through legends on their own coins that they descended

from the veterans of both legions established in Berytus under Augustus (Sawaya 2009, 245 and 277). Between ad 194 and 198, Tyre, which had fought against Niger and Berytus, had already received the homage of the Roman colony of Lepcis Magna, the birthplace of Severus, as a "mother-city" (metropolis) of this venerable Tyrian colony (Aliquot 2017). Around ad 198, probably on the occasion of Severus's second stay in the Orient, the city became the Colonia Septimia Tyrus as well as the capital of the new province of Syria Phoenice.

In Coele Syria, the second Severan province resulting from the partition of Syria, the Greek city of Laodicea-by-the-Sea, once distinguished by Caesar under the name of Iulia Laodicea and restored by Augustus after the civil wars at the end of the Roman Republic, had also sided with Severus, unlike Antioch (Aliquot 2010). In ad 194, it replaced Antioch as provincial capital and metropolis of the four Syrian districts of the imperial cult, while Antioch was not only deprived of its status but also temporarily reduced to a village dependent on its neighbor. When Antioch was finally rehabilitated, Laodicea was elevated to the rank of a Roman colony, in the summer or autumn of ad 197. In addition, to thank its citizens and to compensate for the damage inflicted by the troops of Niger, the new Colonia Septimia Laodicea Severiana metropolis obtained, among other manifestations of "imperial generosity" (*liberalitas Augusti*), an annual donation of wheat, a privilege still celebrated under Caracalla as an "eternal benefaction" (*aeternum beneficium*).

The same scenario of reward, punishment, rehabilitation, and compensation against a backdrop of civic rivalries may have occurred in Syria Palaestina between Neapolis, which was deprived for a while of its status as a city, and Sebaste (Samaria), which was granted colonial status under the name of the Colonia Lucia Septimia Sebaste (Kushnir-Stein 2000). In addition, Septimius Severus also founded a series of colonies in the newly conquered province of Mesopotamia (Speidel 2007): Carrhae, Nisibis, Rhesaena, and Singara. This policy was to be continued by his successors from the same dynasty, Caracalla (ad 211–217), Elagabalus (ad 218–222), and Severus Alexander (ad 222–235), who belonged on the maternal side to a family from Emesa in Syria Phoenice. Between ad 215 and 217, Severus's son Caracalla found himself engaged in campaigns against the Parthians, like his father before him. During these years, colonial status was awarded to Emesa, understandably with the *ius Italicum* because it was the native city of his mother Julia Domna, and to Edessa, the former capital of the kingdom of Osrhoene that was now incorporated into the province of Mesopotamia. Antioch, finally forgiven for its support of Niger and reestablished in its role as the capital of Coele Syria, was similarly honored by Caracalla (or Elagabalus), without obtaining exemption from tribute. Possibly Palmyra was distinguished at the same time (if not already under Septimius Severus), so that from that moment on the inscriptions of the city mentioned the new colonial institutions in both Greek and Palmyrene Aramaic (with phrases like στρατηγὸς τῆς λαμπροτάτης κολωνείας and *ʾsṭrṭgʾ dy qlnyʾ* as translations of *duumvir clarissimae coloniae*, for example; see *IGLS* XVII/1, 65). After Caracalla, his two successors and cousins were in their turn responsible for the foundation of several colonies: Elagabalus thus promoted Sidon (Colonia Aurelia Pia metropolis Sidoniorum) and Arca (Colonia Caesarea Libani/Ituraeorum) in Syria Phoenice, as well as Petra in Provincia Arabia; Severus Alexander can be credited with the granting of colonial status to Bostra, the capital of Roman Arabia, and maybe to Amida in Mesopotamia.

To complete the picture, it is worth mentioning the last colonial promotions of the third century ad, while leaving aside some cases that are still poorly dated (Ascalon, Dura-Europos, Gadara, Gaza, Scythopolis, and Tiberias) or very doubtful (Maximianopolis). Philip I (ad 244–249) granted colonial status to Flavia Neapolis in Palaestina and possibly to Damascus in Syria Phoenice. His own native place, the village of the Sabaoi in Provincia Arabia, also became a colony under the name of Philippopolis and benefited from imperial generosity (*IGLS* XV, 467–514, especially 467–471). The emperor is sometimes credited with seeking to make this new

city an example of his desire to revive the traditions of the early empire and the golden age on the eve of the millennium of Rome. Be that as it may, the promotion of the colony and its inhabitants was accompanied on the spot by an abundance of dedications to Philip and his family, especially in the imperial sanctuary that was built for this purpose.

Ins and Outs of Colonization

After almost three centuries, the integration of no less than thirty colonies into the civic network of the Near East and Mesopotamia meant that the Roman provinces of the area became the best endowed with settlements of this status in the Orient (fig. 15.2).

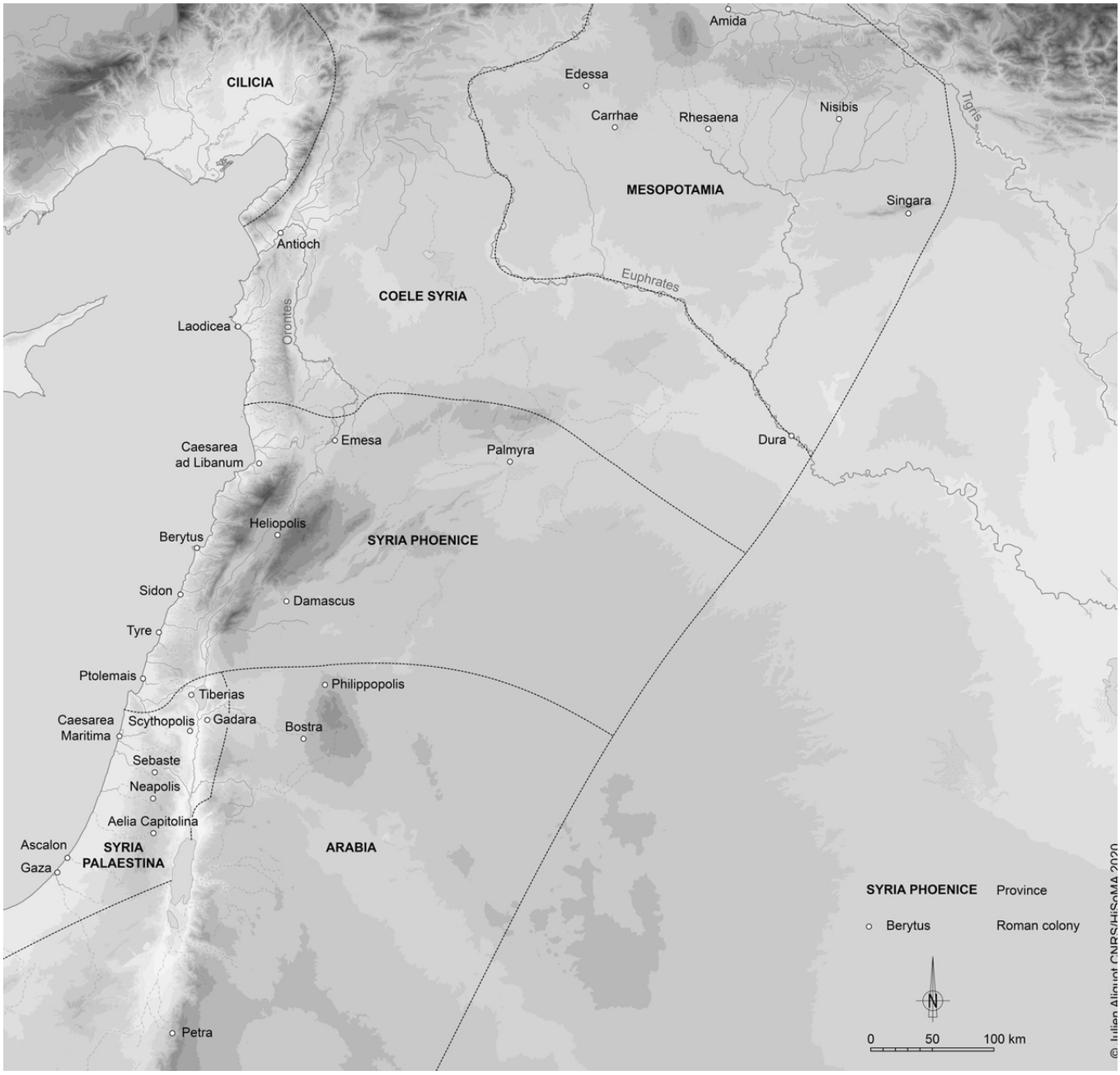

FIGURE 15.2. The Roman colonies in Syria and Mesopotamia in the middle of the third century **AD**. © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma 2020.

Of course, not all colonies between the Mediterranean and the Tigris can be put on the same level, as we have already had occasion to point out by noting the cases in which colonial foundations were able to benefit from the *ius Italicum* or more restricted privileges. In the same vein, we can also mention the emergence of an emulation specific to the group of colonies and independent of the search for honors in which the Greek cities were engaged under Roman rule. Over time, some of them adorned themselves with the title of *metrocolonia* (Emesa, Palmyra, Petra), while others took the title of *augustocolonia* (Bostra, Petra). In detail, the reasons for obtaining these lofty titles or even colonial status remain to be elucidated in most cases. Nevertheless, the personal involvement of the emperors in Rome's eastern campaigns and the regional origin of some of them certainly played a crucial role in the multiplication of the *coloniae*, especially under the Severi.

Another aspect seems to have long been overlooked in research, on the assumption that the status of *colonia* was only granted on an honorary basis after Hadrian (e.g., Sherwin-White 197 3, 413; Millar 1990; Pollard 2000, 63–64). Over the past twenty years or so, the distinction that modern historians sometimes make between veteran colonies and so-called honorary colonies has been repeatedly and rightly questioned. From a legal and institutional point of view, this distinction is meaningless, since all the *coloniae* were formally portions of the *res publica populi Romani* and extensions of Roman citizenship (*civitas Romana*) in the provinces. By definition, the colonial communities were all endowed with a constitutional framework defined by a law modeled on an archetype drawn up in Rome, of which the *lex Ursonensis* is an example. This is why even the Greek cities that the Severi transformed into colonies adopted Roman institutions, as well as Latin as the language of public life (not without adaptations to local particularities). As a result, it is technically unsuitable to characterize as "honorary" those colonies that were not legally distinguished from the colonies of veterans.

The alleged opposition between veteran and "honorary" colonies is also inappropriate for the simple reason that there is evidence of veterans settling in the *coloniae* of the Near East and Mesopotamia up to the middle of the third century ad. Even in the latest foundations, the colonial coinages bear non only images and Latin legends that express pride in being Roman (Roma, the Dioscuri, Marsyas, the Roman she-wolf feeding Romulus and Remus, founder type), but also legionary standards (*vexilla*) that refer to military colonization or resettlement (see especially Dąbrowa 2004; 2005; and 2012). The most telling type on this point is the founder type. It shows, on the reverse of coins, a priest with a team of oxen plowing the primitive furrow (*sulcus primigenius*) to delineate the borders of the new colony. When this ritual foundation scene is associated with military standards, it should not be assumed that the city hosted troops (although this was of course possible for other reasons). On the other hand, it can be concluded that veterans from the legions whose names are sometimes readable on the *vexilla* were installed on its soil at one time or another. So, under the Severi, former recruits from the Legio III Gallica made up the first groups of settlers in Tyre and Sidon and also joined the older colonies of Ptolemais and Caesarea Maritima. In the heart of the city of Tyre, a Latin dedication addressed by the *veterani* to the Genius of the Oath (*Genius sacramenti*) vividly confirms the settlement of veterans here (Yon and Aliquot 2016, 152, no. 307). Ex-soldiers from the Mesopotamian Legio III Parthica were asked to help found Rhesaena and Sidon (for the latter, see Abou Diwan 2013, who, however, considered that a detachment of the legion was stationed in Sidon).

In the absence of unit names on the *vexilla*, it is not always known from which legions veterans sent to other cities came (e.g., in Caesarea ad Libanum under Elagabalus). Nevertheless, it appears that some kind of settlement program for veterans from the legions stationed in the Near East and Mesopotamia was organized in a pragmatic way under the Severi. This policy was occasionally continued afterward. Ex-soldiers from the Legio VI Ferrata

were dispatched to Tyre and Damascus under Philip I. For the emperors of the late second and third centuries ad, it was no longer a question of satisfying the needs of Italian proletaries, as was the case until the pivotal period between the republic and the empire. On the other hand, the settlement of landless veterans could always represent an opportunity to stimulate the loyalty of their troops, to consolidate local clienteles, and to encourage the restocking of civic communities that had sometimes suffered during the civil wars (for example, Laodicea, Sidon, and Tyre, all three badly damaged by Pescennius Niger and his allies).

From the point of view of the cities, one has to wonder what interest there could be in becoming a Roman colony (with or without veterans), especially after the *constitutio Antoniniana* (ad 212) had extended Roman citizenship to all free men of the empire. Apparently, this was to depend largely on the privileges and benefits granted along with colonial status, even more than on obtaining a highly prized civic title. All Syrian towns but the "allied" (*foederata*) city of Tyre were liable for the tribute assessed on cultivated land (*tributum soli*) and the head tax (*capitatio*) as well as tolls and shipping taxes (*portoria*) at the very beginning of the Roman Empire. Step by step, complete exemption from tribute also allowed the colonies of Berytus, Caesarea Maritima, Heliopolis, Laodicea, and Emesa to have resources that most communities were deprived of. Moreover, the honor of being a *colonia* was likely to call for other privileges. At Heliopolis, for example, the acquisition of the *ius Italicum* under Septimius Severus was most probably followed by the inauguration of a contest called *certamen sacrum Capitolinum oecumenicum iselasticum Heliupolitanum* (Aliquot 2019b). The competitions were modeled on the Roman Capitolia and closely linked to the cult of the Heliopolitan triad, especially Mercury's. In the background, the issue of games was related to old rivalries between Heliopolis and Berytus for control over the great Heliopolitan sanctuary. For the emperors (maybe Severus himself), the grant of the Capitolia was not only a symbolic gift designed to increase artificially the prestige of the newly founded colony. It was also a very concrete approach to ensure regular income for the Heliopolitan gods and citizens. In addition, for the Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis, entering the great network of cities celebrating ecumenical games meant that the city could make people forget its barbarian origins in the most beautiful way, by standing as an emanation of the universe and by hosting, at least for the duration of the festival, representatives from the whole Greek world united in common competitions and rituals.

Rome's influence in the Near East far exceeded the mere use of Latin, the settlement of veterans, or the spread of the *civitas Romana* to the borders of the empire. The foundation of *coloniae* indeed had unexpected effects on local traditions, especially in Phoenicia (Aliquot 2019 c). From the moment they became colonies, Sidon and Tyre repeatedly opted for coin types referring to a pre-Greek or un-Greek past. A distinction must be made between the heroes of the Agenorid lineage (Cadmus, Europa, Harmonia) and other characters (the Carthaginian queen Dido, her brother Pygmalion) who were mainly known then for their links with Aeneas, Trojan hero and ancestor of Romulus and Remus in Roman mythology: contrary to the former, which were already portrayed on Hellenistic coins, the latter only appeared from the time of the Severi onward, at a time when the Berytians also chose to depict Aeneas in their coinage (Saw aya 2009, 265–266, for colonial bronzes struck in Berytus under Elagabalus, with on the reverse Aeneas fleeing from Troy, holding his son Ascanius by the hand, and carrying his father Anchises on his shoulder). Since they had obtained colonial status and veteran settlers, Tyre and Sidon were placed on the same footing as Berytus in the search for honors. For the Tyrians in particular, the coins with Dido and Pygmalion supplemented the available evidence on family ties between the great Phoenician metropolis and its western colonies, such as Gades, Carthage, and above all Lepcis Magna, Severus's native town. All this justified a revision of their most venerable traditions through borrowings from Roman mythology.

Tyrian colonial coins also show the image of an original Tyche standing and dressed like an Amazon, her left foot on a galley spur, a mast on her left arm, her right hand stretched out toward a trophy installed on a gnarled tree trunk, while a winged Victory, standing on a small column placed on her left, crowns her in one hand while the other holds a palm leaf. Alongside this Tyche appears the small Marsyas of the Forum, as well as the palm tree and the murex. The tutelary goddess of Tyre has long been associated with other Amazonian Tychai, who may derive from the images of the goddess Rome and who often symbolized towns in the eastern part of the empire, particularly Berytus and Caesarea Maritima (Kropp 2011). At the time their city was being raised to the level of these prestigious colonies, the Tyrians managed to distinguish themselves from their rivals by forging a specific image. The palm tree (φοῖνιξ) at the foot of their Tyche was no neutral borrowing from the local Hellenistic repertoire. While evoking the personification of Phoenicia, the use of this Phoenician motif par excellence, which they had adopted a long time ago, now testified to the claims of the Colonia Septimia Tyrus to primacy in Roman Syria (Aliquot 2017, 83–85).

Colonial Echoes from Late Antiquity

Late antique sources occasionally suggest the vitality of colonial institutions or more simply reveal the permanence of colonial titles between the beginning of the fourth and the end of the seventh centuries AD (Aliquot 2010, 64–65, with further references). Duumvirs are reported in Scythopolis and Edessa around 308–311, at Heliopolis in 430–431, and in Gaza in the fifth century AD. Quaestors were still active at Bostra in 325–326 and in the fifth century AD. The class of decurions (*ordo decurionum*) still met at Berytus and in Laodicea under Constantius II (AD 337–361) to pay homage in Latin to the highest officials or the emperor. Some cities proudly displayed their colonial title until very late in history: Ascalon in AD 359, Berytus and Tyre in 451 (fig. 15.3), Aelia Capitolina in 536, Petra in 537, Gaza in 538, and Gadara in 662.

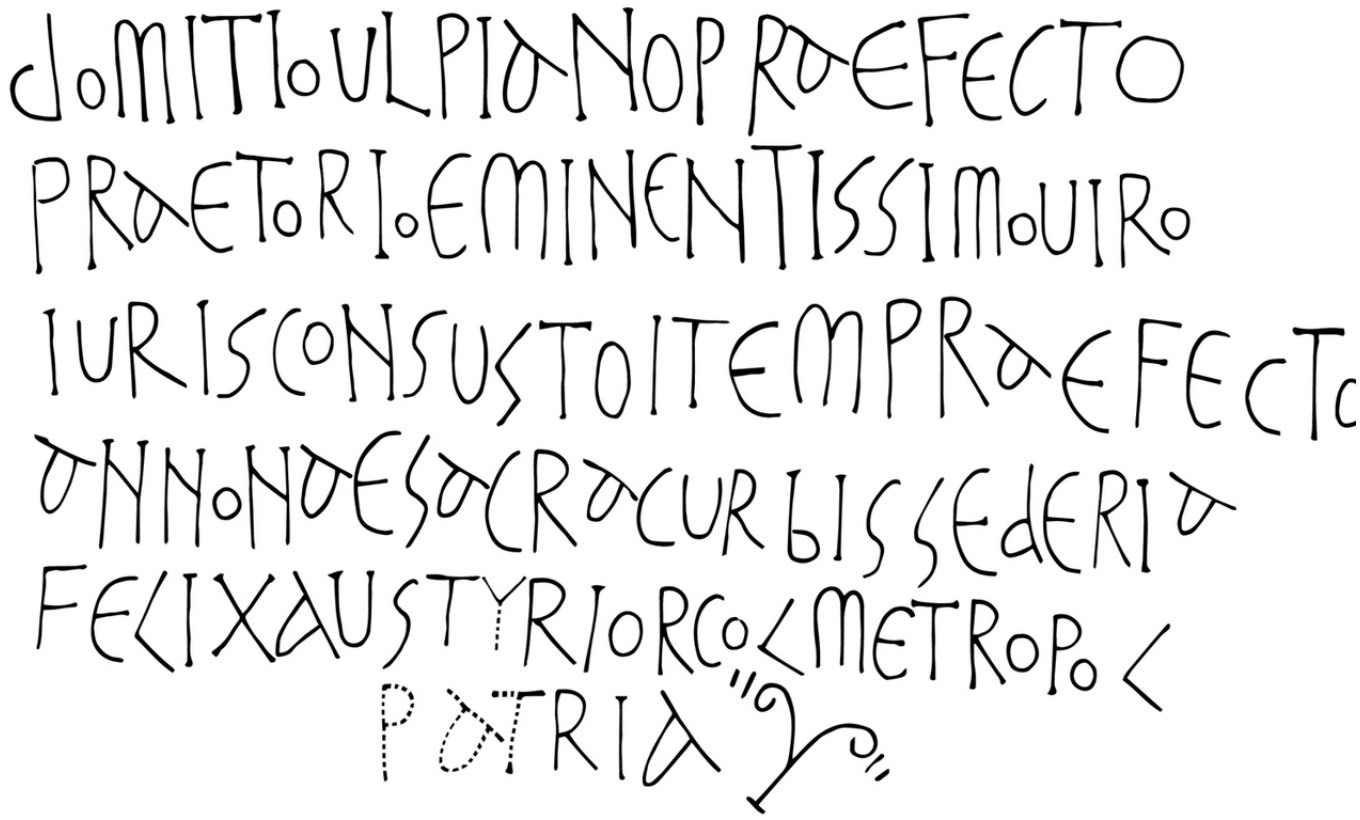

FIGURE 15.3. Tyre: late antique Latin dedication to the lawyer Ulpian by the colony and metropolis of Tyre, *Seberia Felix Aug(usta) Tyrior(um) col(onia) metropol(is)*, his homeland. © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma, IGLS Archive 2020.

The investigation should be continued by taking into account the changes that may have affected the political organization of these cities up to the end of antiquity (Laniado 2002). In any case, it would be inaccurate to consider that the colonial status had fallen into disuse after the third century ad. Although Greek eventually supplanted Latin in the empire of Byzantium, the bud of *Romanitas* sown under Augustus had taken firm root. The colonies could rightly continue to bind their fate to Rome's destiny. It is certainly no coincidence that Nonnos of Panopolis, the Greek poet of the fifth century ad, chose to highlight precisely this unbreakable link to prophesy the story of Berytus and its eponymous nymph Beroe in his *Dionysiaca* (41.389–398):

> When Augustus shall hold the sceptre of the world, Ausonian Zeus will give to divine Rome the lordship, and to Beroe he will grant the reins of law, when armed in her fleet of shielded ships she shall pacify the strife of battlestirring Cleopatra. For before that, citysacking violence will never cease to shake citysaving peace, until Berytus the nurse of quiet life does justice on land and sea, fortifying the cities with the unshakable wall of law, one city for all cities of the world. (Translated by Rouse 1955, 225)

Abbreviations

CIIP: Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010–.
IGLS: Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Paris/Beirut: Geuthner/Presses de l'Ifpo, 1929–.
RPC: Roman Provincial Coinage. London: British Museum Press, 1992–.

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CHAPTER 16

THE ROMAN ARMY IN SYRIA

Size, Mission, Deployment, and Interactions

MICHAEL A. SPEIDEL

Introduction

Within a few decades of its establishment in 64 BC, Provincia Syria turned into one of the Roman Empire's most important military provinces (cf., e.g., Kennedy and Riley 1990; Millar 1992, passim; Butcher 2003, 399–421; Sartre 2005, passim; Wheeler 2007; Edwell 2008; Fischer-Genz 2012, 1027–1029; Stoll 2022). The troops that garrisoned Roman Syria belonged to an empire-wide organization that was uniformly led, organized, equipped, and administered, and had a very distinct culture (e.g., Cosme 2007; Erdkamp 2007; Speidel 2009, 22–35; Speidel 2014b). Yet, despite general uniformity, the soldiers of the Roman army were profoundly interconnected with the province they garrisoned. Thus, the Roman army of Provincia Syria became the *exercitus Syriacus* (*BMC* III, nos. 1686–1691). Because of the dearth of evidence, the development of the army's distribution across the Syrian landscape and its impact on and interaction with local communities and economies remain poorly documented. This is true in spite of the multifaceted source material that comprises Greek and Latin narrative history, as well as encyclopedic, geographical, rhetorical, biographical, and legal texts, inscriptions, graffiti, military diplomas, and papyri (including some written material in Syriac, Palmyrene, Aramaic, Nabataean, and other local languages), coins, and archaeological finds and findings. In some respects, this evidence is unique and particularly rich. Above all, this is true for the famous papyri from Dura Europos, as they allow exceptional insights into the administration and functioning of an auxiliary unit on one of the empire's most remote frontiers during the early third century AD (cf. Stauner 2004; Phang 2007; Speidel 2009, 213–234 and 283–304; Speidel 2018). Yet, although the surviving evidence provides a wealth of historical data, it also shows that it is infinitely more characterized by great loss and uneven distribution over time and space. Papyri, for instance, are known only from the middle Euphrates (Dura Europos), the Judaean Desert, and Masada, while the Hauran with its durable basalt stone is far over-represented in the surviving military inscriptions (due partly to the comparatively high scientific interest in the region, and, perhaps, to local epigraphic habits).

Coming into Being

Pompey's victories in the East led to a restructuring of the political landscape of eastern Anatolia, the south Caucasus, and the entire Near East. In 64 BC, the Roman general annexed the remnants of the Seleucid kingdom and transformed them into Provincia Syria, Rome's first province in the Near East. As so often when Rome established new provinces, the army was instrumental in creating Provincia Syria, too. Moreover, Roman troops were immediately deployed to subjugate a series of dynasts in Lebanon and Palestine and to prepare a

campaign against the Nabataeans (Flor. 1.40.29; Plut., *Pomp.* 38; App., *Mith.* 106, 498; Cass. Dio 37.15.1). Thus, from the outset, Rome's military presence in Syria was also employed to project power beyond the province's confines.

Plutarch for one believed that Pompey's march south was inspired mainly by his ambition to reach the Red Sea. According to the Greek biographer, Pompey sought to make up for his earlier failure to reach the Caspian by extending his conquests to the Red Sea, as this would have allowed him to declare that his victories reached the "outer Ocean" both in the West (in Africa and Spain) and in the East. In any event, the inscriptions on Pompey's victory monuments in Rome publicly declared that he had conquered all the country from the Black Sea to the Red (Plut., *Pomp*. 38. Victory monuments: Diod. 40.4, and Plin., *HN* 7.26.97 with Speidel, forthcoming. Cf. also Gruen 1985, 1:258). More specifically, Rome's interest in the wider region of Syria lay in its fertile agricultural land, the Mediterranean port cities, and the various long-distance trade routes to the north, south, and east. In particular, this included the roads that led to the major crossing of the Euphrates at Seleukeia/Zeugma and connected the Mediterranean with Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, Parthia, and countries farther east. Yet in the light of the rising power of Parthia, considerations other than trade, customs duties, and taxes also have played an increasingly important role. The creation and garrisoning of the new province thus allowed Rome to secure its rule and protect its political and economic interests in the Near East and eastern Asia Minor.

At any rate, the rivalry with Parthia soon began to dominate the activities of the Roman army in Syria (Cf. e.g., Cic., *Ad fam*. 15.1.2). Moreover, Parthia (and Sassanid Persia) became the prime concern of Rome's policy in the East for centuries to come. Pompey left two legions in the province when he hurried back to Pontos in early 62 bc (permanent garrison places are not known), and apparently gave orders to complete a projected campaign against the Nabataeans (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 14.5.1 [80–81]; Jos., *BI* 1.8.1 [159]). The north Arabian kingdom was forced to become a Roman ally, but Parthia resisted Roman domination. A period of military conflicts ensued. M. Licinius Crassus and his army were defeated at Carrhae in 53 bc while trying to invade Parthia. In 51–50 bc, Parthian soldiers operated in Syria. In 44 bc, during Caesar's preparations for his planned Parthian war, the number of Roman legions in Syria was increased to seven (Keppie 1998, 112–113 and 120–121). A few years later, in the wake of Rome's civil wars in 40–39 bc, Parthian soldiers occupied Provincia Syria. In 36 bc, Mark Antony made for Parthia with a large Roman army, and suffered defeat in Media Atropatene. He resumed his attack in 34 and 33 bc without, however, succeeding in imposing Roman domination over the great eastern rival. Finally, Imperator Caesar's victories at Actium and Alexandria in 31 and 30 bc put an end to this phase, which no doubt had a critical impact on Roman attitudes about the army's role in the East.

Size and Mission

Unsurprisingly, Syria was counted among the unpacified provinces in the new Augustan order (cf. Sartre 2005, 54–60). In consequence, the province was assigned in 27 BC to the proconsular command of Imperator Caesar Augustus, the new sole ruler of the Roman world, who delegated his Syrian *imperium* to a consular *legatus Augusti pro praetore* (Dąbrowa 1998, 13). The province's initial permanent garrison of three legions was soon raised to four (III Gallica, VI Ferrata, X Fretensis, and XII Fulminata: Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 17.10.1 [251], 17.10.9 [286]; Jos., *BI* 11.3.1 [40]; Tac., *Ann*. 4.3; cf. Keppie 2000, 183; Pollard 2000, 21–32; Sartre 2005, 60–63). Hence, there were around 20,000 to 22,000 legionary soldiers stationed in

Provincia Syria during the Julio-Claudian period. The number of soldiers serving in regular auxiliary units in this period is unknown, but if we follow Tacitus's general estimation for the year AD 23, their strength may have roughly equaled those in the legions (Tac., *Ann*. 4.5). At any rate, this goes well with the number of 22,500 auxiliaries that Josephus reports to have taken part in the Jewish War in AD 67 (Jos., *BI* 3.4.2). Rome's regular troops in Syria thus presumably numbered between around 40,000 and 44,000 during the Julio-Claudian period.

As one of the most heavily armed provinces of the Roman Empire, Syria, in this period, was very much a military province. Guarding the province from foreign invaders was the official mission of the Roman army and its allied forces in Syria (Philo, *Leg*. 31.207; Jos., *BI* 5.1.6; *Bell. Alex*. 65). For this reason, most of the Roman army was stationed in the north of the province near the Euphrates, where the Parthians were deemed to be a military threat (Philo, *Leg.* 31.207 and 34.259; Eck 2016b). Yet the Roman governors ultimately also commanded the soldiers of the many dependent allied kings and dynasts under their *imperium* (Tac., *Ann*. 4.5; Jos., *BI* 2.16.4), for these were obliged to provide military support whenever the Syrian governor requested it (cf. e.g., *Bell. Alex*. 65; Millar 1992, 53–56, 71–72, 75; Speidel 2016a, 168; 2016b). According to Tacitus, Tiberius entrusted the Syrian governor Lucius Vitellius (ad 35 to 39) with all endeavors in the East (Tac., *Ann*. 6.32: "et cunctis quae apud Orientem parabantur L. Vitellium praefecit." Cf. Dąbrowa 1998, 38–41; Speidel 2009, 591–592). This was hardly a special command and therefore probably applied to all other Syrian legates during the Julio-Claudian period.

A few transmitted numbers may help to establish orders of magnitude of the size of the allied military forces at the disposal of the Roman governor of Syria. Thus, king Herod's army numbered at least 500 horsemen and 2,500 foot soldiers (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 19.9.2 (365); *BI* 3.4.2 [66]: transformed into one *ala* and five cohorts in ad 6). The royal regiments of the small kingdom of Commagene counted at least 3,000 foot soldiers and 500 horsemen (Speidel 2009, 577: transformed into one *ala* and six cohorts in ad 17/18). Later, king Antiochus IV (ad 38–72) contributed 2,000 horsemen and 3,000 foot soldiers to the Roman army that marched against the Jewish insurgents in ad 66 (Jos., *BI* 2.18.9). One year later, Antiochus and other dynasts each contributed 1,000 horsemen and 1,000 archers, whereas the Nabataean king Malchus sent 1,000 horsemen and 5,000 foot soldiers (most of them archers), which, according to Josephus, brought the Roman army facing the Jews in ad 67 up to 60,000 (Jos., *BI* 3.4.2; the royal Nabataean army was transformed into six Cohortes Petraeorum [3,000 foot soldiers] after the provincialization of the kingdom in 106). To this total we must add an unknown number of regular and irregular royal soldiers who stayed behind to ensure security.

During the first half of the first century ad, several of Rome's allied kingdoms in the East were transformed into provincial territories and placed under the local command of an equestrian prefect: e.g., Judaea (ad 6–66; Eck 2016a, esp. 31–34; 2017), Commagene (ad 17/18–38; Facella 2006, 316–318; Speidel 2009, 563–580), and (probably) Cappadocia (ad 17/18 to 58; Suet., *Vesp*. 8; Cass. Dio 57.17.7; cf. e.g. Brunt 1983 56; Haensch 1997, 397.; Eck 2007, 199; Speidel 2009, 589–594; 2014a, 628–629. Contra: Wheeler 2017, 163-164). The royal troops, most of which were usually converted into regular Roman auxiliary units on such occasions, remained under the overall command of the Syrian governor (cf. Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 19.8.1 [338–341]; Brunt 1983, 55–56; Eck 2008; Speidel 2009, 574–578 and 591–593; 2014a, 628–629). The sphere of authority of the governor of Syria during most of the Julio-Claudian period thus included Pontos (Jos., *BI* 2.16.4 [366–367]; Tac., *Ann*. 4.5; cf. also Wheeler 2011, 134–141, though he ignores the passage from Tacitus), Armenia (both minor and major: Tac., *Ann*. 12.45–48), Cappadocia, Commagene, and Judaea; Cilicia (Tac., *Ann*. 6.41 and 12.55), and Nabataea (e.g., Tac., *Ann*. 2.57; Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 16.9.1–3 [271–290]; 17.3.2

[57]; 18.5.1–3 [115–126] with Tac., *Ann*. 6.32; Cass. Dio 68.14.5; see also *Peripl. m. Erythr.* 19 with Speidel 2021b, 98-99 for the integration of the kingdom into the fabrics of the empire). It also included various kingdoms on the east coast of the Black Sea, where, if we are to believe Josephus, as many as 3,000 legionary soldiers and forty ships were deployed to keep the peace (at least in ad 66). In his account of the distribution of Rome's military forces in ad 23, Tacitus (*Ann*. 4.5) explains that the Syrian command even comprised the "protection" of the entire south Caucasus "against any foreign power." Rome's soldiers under the Syrian command were thus responsible for keeping and enforcing Roman order against foreign foes and internal enemies in the entire Near East, on the one hand, and for keeping control of a great many dependent kings and dynasts there, on the other.

Deployment Strategies

Roman decision makers distributed the army in Syria to locations they no doubt considered to be of relevant importance (for a detailed account, see Keppie 2000, 182–200; Stoll 2022). Unfortunately, the only known (permanent?) legionary garrison place in the earliest period is Cyrrhus, where Legio X Fretensis is attested in the winter of AD 18/19 (Tac., *Ann*. 2.57). One of the other Syrian legions (III Gallica?) may have been stationed at Raphanea (Keppie 2000, 184; Wheeler 2007, 241). Legionary veterans were settled at Berytos (mod. Beirut) and Baalbek (Keppie 2000, 186), and later, under Claudius, in the newly founded colony of Ptolemais (cf. Millar 1992, 65. For veterans in the Near East in general, see Stoll 2015). Antioch, as the governor's seat, was of course the garrison place of his guards, the *equites* and *pedites singulares consularis* (drawn from the *auxilia* of the Syrian army), as well as the place of duty of the (legionary) soldiers serving in his staff (Haensch 1997, 247–249; Sartre 2005, 189). Otherwise, there is no evidence that Antioch witnessed the permanent garrisoning of Roman units within the city or in its immediate vicinity.

According to Philo of Alexandria (*Leg*. 31.207 and 34.259), much of the Roman army in Syria was moved to the Euphrates during the reign of Tiberius. Ever since Pompey's agreements with the Parthians, Rome considered crossings of the Euphrates by Parthian armies an act of military aggression. The river thus marked the eastern border of Roman provincial territory (thus e.g., Vell. 2.101; Str., *Geog*. 6.4.2; Tac., *Ann*. 2.58, 4.5, 6.37; App., *Mithr*. 104; Cass. Dio 36.45–51; Ziegler 1964, 28–32; Wagner 1985, 16–17; Millar 1992, 66; Gebhardt 2002, 24; Butcher 2003, 32; Speidel 2009, 565–567). However, Rome never restrained from intervening and exercising its influence beyond its boundaries. Moreover, the river marked a border between Roman provincial territory in the West and the countries beyond only along its course through Anatolia and the Fertile Crescent into the Syrian steppe. After the river entered the desert, its function began more to resemble that of a bridge, for the uninhabitable regions to its left and right were unsuitable as deployment zones for large armies. After flowing into the desert, a stretch of the river was considered to belong to the Romans. This, at any rate, appears to be what an often overlooked passage in Isidorus of Charax's *Parthian Stations* suggests, in which the author identified the fortified town of Nagabath near the confluence of the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers as the place where one crossed to (and hence also from) the "Roman side" (Isid. 1; for the passage referring to caravans [not armies] cf. Gawlikowski 1996, 131). Later, during the Parthian War of ad 161–166, this point was moved further downriver to Dura Europos (cf. Speidel 1998, 172).

Philo's statement may have been based, in part, on the tenth legion moving from Cyrrhus (?) closer to the Euphrates. If so, this legion may have been installed somewhere near

Zeugma, the main crossing of the river, for Zeugma played a particularly important role as a symbolic, fiscal, and of course military boundary marker on the Euphrates in northern Syria until the end of the second century ad (Str., *Geog*. 17.1.28; cf. Millar 1992, 33, 53, 58, 66; Hartmann and Speidel 2003; 2013; Edwell 2013). However, archaeological remains of a permanent legionary fortress or of its cemeteries have not yet been identified at Zeugma or in its immediate vicinity, despite various efforts in recent decades (cf. Hartmann and Speidel 2003, 203; 2013; Speidel 2019b.). In any event, in 66/67 Legio X Fretensis was sent south to participate in the Jewish War. After the Roman conquest and destruction of Jerusalem in ad 70, the tenth legion was established as that city's permanent garrison (Isaac 1992, 279–280 and 427–428; Geva 2003. Cf. now esp. *CIIP* I.2, nos. 712, 717, 721, 722–727). Judaea (renamed Syria Palaestina in 136/137) now became an independent province with its own army under the command of a senatorial legate. At Zeugma (?), the former "guards of the Euphrates" were replaced by Legio IV Scythica, whose soldiers now took on that role (Jos., *BI* 5.1.6 [45]; cf. Philo, *Leg*. 31.207; Hartmann and Speidel 2003, 102). The importance of the fourth legion is reflected by the fact that its commander henceforth acted as replacement whenever the position of governor in Syria was vacant.

The enormous size of the Syrian governor's task and the gigantic space he had to control proved to be too much for the rudimentary Roman government when political stability in Armenia started to deteriorate in ad 51 and a war with Parthia broke out in ad 58. In ad 66, only three years after the end of this war, a great revolt exploded in Judaea and turned into full-scale warfare. In order to prevail in these wars, Rome had to send additional high-ranking military commanders (Cn. Domitius Corbulo, L. Caesennius Paetus, T. Flavius Vespasianus) and troops from other parts of the empire into the region. More important, the nearly two decades of Near Eastern crisis and the political, military, logistic, and administrative lessons they taught Rome dramatically changed the way the empire governed its eastern territories. The process of restructuring the eastern frontier began immediately after the end of the Parthian War in ad 64 with Domitius Corbulo consolidating the military installations on the banks of the Euphrates and beyond the river in Sophene (Tac., *Ann*. 15.9; *CIL* III, 6741-2 = *ILS* 232 [Kharput, ad 64/65]; cf. Bru 2015). The build-up lasted over a decade, and apparently aimed to significantly increase Rome's military power and efficiency in the East without having to establish new provinces beyond the Euphrates. A milestone with a building inscription found near Antioch attests the presence in Syria in ad 75 of four legions (III Gallica, IV Scythica, VI Ferrata, and XVI Flavia Firma) and twenty cohorts involved in a construction project that was only one among several, designed primarily to improve the army's mobility and supply system (*AE* 1983, 927 with van Berchem 1985; cf. Speidel 2012, 604; 2014c, 93).

The centerpiece of the new arrangement, however, was the permanent detachment of Cappadocia from the Syrian command and its gradual transformation into a second major military province that was administered together with Galatia from ad 75/76 until Trajan's Parthian War (ad 114–117) (Speidel 2009, 581–594 and 595–632; 2014a). The Roman governor of Provincia Syria and his army were thus no longer directly involved in the affairs of the northern regions. The command structures were also changed in other parts of the province in these years. The allied kingdoms of Commagene, Armenia Minor, Chalkis, and Emesa were turned into provincial territory. Judaea received a senatorial governor of praetorian rank and a permanent garrison at Jerusalem in ad 70 (Legio X Fretensis). It too was thus permanently detached from Provincia Syria (Eck 2016b). In ad 106, finally, Nabataea in the south was also withdrawn from the responsibilities of the Syrian governor. For in this year the kingdom was occupied by Roman troops (invading, in part, from Syria) and turned into Provincia Arabia under the command of a governor of praetorian rank, and with a garrison of

one legion (soon to be established at Bostra), as well as several auxiliary units (for these see Speidel and Weiss 2012 and Speidel 2019a).

After ad 75, the garrison of Roman Syria consisted of three legions, and around 14,500 auxiliary soldiers (Gebhardt 2002, 58–60; Weiss 2006, esp. 289–298). In the north, Legio III Gallica (?) was stationed at the crossing of the Euphrates at Samosata (ad73–117/118). Around 120 km farther south, Legio IV Scythica continued to guard the second major crossing of the Euphrates in Syria. Finally, at Raphanea, from where it could be quickly deployed anywhere within or beyond the province, Syria's third legion, Legio VI Ferrata, was placed in a position of strategic importance. In ad 117/118, as a consequence of the withdrawal from Trajan's most recent conquests, Legio XVI Flavia Firma moved to Samosata, and Legio III Gallica to Raphanea, while Legio IV Scythica returned to Zeugma after a brief episode (ad 114–ca. 117) in which it was the garrison of the short-lived province of Armenia (Speidel 2021a). In the same year (or perhaps a few years earlier), Judaea received a second legion, raising its garrison to around 20,000 soldiers (Eck 2016a and 2016b, 44; 2017, 96–99). Many questions concerning the deployment of Rome's legions in the Near East before Hadrian's reign still remain. The established sequence of legions thereafter was XV Apollinaris at Satala, XII Fulminata at Melitene, XVI Flavia Firma at Samosata, IV Scythica at Zeugma, III Gallica at Raphanea, VI Ferrata at Caparcotna, X Fretensis at Jerusalem, III Cyrenaica at Bostra. This remained unchanged until Septimius Severus established the new province of Mesopotamia under the command of an equestrian governor in ad 195 and garrisoned it with two newly created legions, I and III Parthica in Singara and Resaina (e.g., Sartre 2005, 137; 2009, 181–210). Yet much of how Rome redeployed its forces in the region in response to this new strategic situation, or to the demise of Palmyra in 272/273 remains unknown. Only for the end of the fourth century is detailed evidence for the deployment of Roman troops in Syria on record, as the lists of the *Notitia dignitatum* (or. 32–37) record a great many late Roman troops and their garrison places.

The remains of numerous Roman forts, fortlets, and watchtowers have been discovered in Greater Syria (cf. e.g., Kennedy and Riley 1990, esp. 138–221; Pollard 2000, 43, and 57–58; Konrad 2001; Gebhardt 2002, 50–52, 60–61; Parker 2007; Gschwind and Hasan 2008; Fischer-Genz 2012, 1027–1029). Most of them were in the steppe or desert and appear to be of late Roman date. Also, the names of many of the fluctuating number of auxiliary units in Syria are known from a few inscriptions and, above all, from military diplomas (See Weiss 2006; Add: *AE* 2007, 1238, 1766 and 1767; *AE* 2008, 1753; *AE* 2011, 1810; *AE* 2012, 1955 and 1956; *AE* 2014, 1657; *AE* 2015, 1903; *AE* 2016, 2022 and 2023; EDCS-69000070; EDCS-69000071; EDCS-76500034; EDCS-76700069; EDCS-76700070; EDCS-79300045; EDCS-81000047. Deployment: cf. Butcher 2003, 412–414). These documents reveal the total strength of the *auxilia* in around ad 130 to have amounted to some seven *alae* and twenty-three cohorts (Holder 2017, 22). However, only rarely can the epigraphic data be connected to known military sites. Therefore, too much remains unknown to reconstruct a coherent general history of the Roman army's deployment (and the logic behind it) in the various territories that were once Provincia Syria. What does remain of this history, however, appears to indicate that many of the auxiliary units were also deployed to safeguard the Euphrates, and the main routes from there to Palmyra, Damascus, and Bostra (Sartre 2005, 141–145). Not all were built at the same time or for the sole purpose of answering possible invasions from the east. Local needs for increased security and the protection of long-distance trade can also be recognized as important incentives (Str., *Geog*. 16.2.20; Jos., *Ant*. 15.10.1 [343–348]; Jos., *BI* 1.20.4 [398–400]; cf. Isaac 1992, 62–64; Sartre 2005, 144–145; Haensch 2016; Speidel 2016a, 164; 2019a). Some may have been moved to the banks of the Euphrates as part of Corbulo's

fortification efforts in the 60s, while many others were probably established only under the Severan emperors and particularly during the period in which the Strata Diocletiana was fortified (Konrad 2001, 114).

As is well known, the Roman imperial army was comparatively small with regard to the size of the empire's population, the length of its borders, and the military power of its neighbors (Speidel 2009, 474–483). Rome's solution to prevail in times of war was to set up temporary field armies in distant provinces and to move them to the conflict zones (for Syrian troops in the expeditionary armies of Trajan's Parthian War see now Eck and Speidel 2024). To Syria, most field armies (primarily for the Parthian and Persian wars) were sent from the Danube provinces. Other troops and supplies were transported by ship. The Italian fleets at Misenum and Ravenna provided logistical support for eastern campaigns while Syria's fleet, the *classis Syriaca* (established perhaps under Vespasian) was at times involved in transporting grain to Syria. Therefore, the Syrian harbors, primarily those of Seleuceia-Pieria and Laodiceia, but also Cilician Aegeae (*AE* 1993, 1572) and others played an important logistical role during Rome's eastern wars (Rey-Coquais 1994; Gebhardt 2002, 134–136 and 157–222; Speidel 2009, 257).

The infrastructure for expeditionary armies has left remarkable archaeological and epigraphic traces in Syria and Anatolia. Harbors, canals, roads, and military bases were constructed, improved, and enlarged to facilitate the passage of expeditionary troops (van Berchem 1985; Speidel 2009a; 2012; 2014a, 92–93; cf. Speidel 2021a for such activities in *provincia Armenia*). While waiting for troops from other provinces to arrive or between campaigning seasons, field armies were split up and allocated to different camps in order not to overburden the civilian communities of any one region (Compare Amm. Marc. 23.2.3 for the situation at the beginning of Julian's Persian expedition). It was while staying in such camps that the soldiers set up funerary monuments for the deceased. The best-known example of such a base is that of Legio II Parthica at Syrian Apamea. It is mentioned by Cassius Dio in his description of the events of ad 217–218 (78.34.1; cf. Cass. Dio 78.28.2, 78.29.2, 78.34.2 and 5), and it is further documented by well over one hundred inscriptions (Balty 1988, 97; Balty and van Rengen 1993, 13; EDCS 00082–00084 and 00681–00697; 'Ubi Erat Lupa', 3904–3911, 9321, 9323, 13277–13320, 13324, 16347, 24047–24049. Most military inscriptions from Apamea remain unpublished). The evidence shows that the base at Apamea was reused on several occasions during the third century by the second Parthian legion and several other units. Another such base from the second and third centuries was discovered at Zeugma (Speidel 2009, 260–271; 2012; Hartmann and Speidel 2013). It mainly served troops from the Danube provinces, but soldiers of the North African Legio III Augusta are also attested there. The emperors' horse guard, Equites singulares Augusti, and soldiers from a few other units apparently occupied a similar base in Cilician Anazarbos during the eastern campaigns of the Severan dynasty (IK 56-1, 63–68, 70–72, 530; Sayar 1991; Speidel 1994, 62–63; cf. Speidel 2019b). Inscriptions also point to bases at Cyrrhos (*IGLS* I, 148, 150, 151, 152; *AE* 1955, 225) and Beroia (*IGLS* I, 179, 180, 181; *IGLS* II, 455; *AE* 1987, 953; cf. Gebhardt 2002, 132). There may have been more.

Interaction and Integration

Provincia Syria and the Roman Near East were comparatively heavily armed. Yet, of an estimated total population in Syria of up to four million or more (Kennedy 2006), the 40,000 to 44,000 soldiers of the Roman army of the Julio-Claudian period accounted for only about 1 percent of the province's inhabitants. On the whole, therefore, their visibility in everyday life was probably rather low (cf. Speidel 2009, 474–483). At their garrison places, on the other hand, and at those places where they were sent in significant numbers, they were obviously

highly visible and most likely to have had a very direct impact on the local population. It is of particular significance in this regard that in terms of personnel the legionary and auxiliary soldiers with their officers and commanders (including the governor and prefects) essentially made up almost the entirety of Rome's representatives in the Near East. The most important other official that the Roman state appointed to serve in Syria in this period was the equestrian *procurator*, who, together with his staff from the *familia Caesaris*, was responsible for raising taxes and for paying the troops (Str., *Geog*. 3.4.20; cf. Cass. Dio 53.13.3; Speidel 2009, 69).

At any rate, it can hardly be denied that the soldiers of the Roman army, both as an instrument of power in the hands of imperial Rome and as a community with a distinct culture of its own, had a significant impact on the social, economic, religious, and cultural developments of Greater Syria (see Bru 2011 for Roman measures to ensure dominance and local loyalty in Syria). The dearth of evidence, however, is again a major obstacle to writing a coherent history of such issues. Nevertheless, several direct consequences of the Roman army's presence in Syria are easily distinguished such as the procurement, locally and from afar, of recruits, animals, supplies of food, arms, textiles, materiel, and other resources, the construction of roads and other infrastructure, the soldiers' pay and the dissemination of minted money, Roman citizenship and veteran settlement, the introduction of new cults, or soldiers policing and enforcing a Roman understanding of peace (cf. e.g., Pollard 2000, passim; Roth 2002; Stoll 2015, esp. 59–121; 2022).

Although, on the whole, Roman rule was acceptable to its subjects, it is well known that the presence of Roman soldiers could be a "mixed blessing" to civilian communities (MacMullen 1963, 77–98; Butcher 2003, 402–405; Speidel 2009, 483–500; Stoll 2022, 343–344). The narratives of Acts and Josephus's histories illustrate how in Judaea (but no doubt elsewhere, too) the *auxilia*, in particular, were deployed in a police role, often causing resentment (Cotton 2007; Speidel 1998, 170). It is noteworthy, therefore, that our literary sources repeatedly imply a close association between cities and military bases in Roman Syria. City life is even said to have spoiled the soldiers in the East, turning their readiness for war into laxity (e.g., Tac., *Hist*. 1.53.14; cf. Wheeler 1996; Speidel 1998, 171; 2009, 538). The colocation of legionary bases with existing cities has therefore been described as a characteristic of the eastern provinces in general and Roman Syria in particular (Kennedy and Riley 1990, 111 and 124–125; Isaac 1992, 123–124 and 133; Gregory 1995–1997, 1:58; Pollard 2000, 43; Butcher 2003, 399; Haynes 2013, 155). The case of Dura Europos is often referred to in this context, for this city housed a Roman garrison between 165 and 256 (Pollard 2000, 44–58; Butcher 2003, 259–261; Sartre 2005, 138 and 194–197). Dura's garrison eventually occupied the northwestern quarters and built a brick wall that separated them from the civilian parts (though soldiers were also billeted elsewhere in the city with local residents). This example and the poverty of evidence for typical Roman fortresses from the first two centuries of imperial rule have therefore given rise to the hypothesis that Roman soldiers in Syria (even entire legions) were usually billeted in cities. The evidence currently available makes it impossible to conclusively prove or disprove this hypothesis. However, it is mainly an *argumentum e silentio*, based on the paucity of archaeological data, which itself is largely a consequence of the comparatively small number of respective archaeological investigations. Moreover, the alleged laxity of the Syrian legions was above all a literary topos (Wheeler 1996).

There may, of course, have been other cities like Dura Europos with Roman garrisons within their walls (cf. e.g., Kennedy and Riley 1990, 111–121; Fiema 2018 for Hegra in Arabia). Also, several of the smaller fortresses of the later phase appear to have been surrounded by

rectangular fortified settlements (e.g., Sura, Tetrapyrgium, al-Khulla, and, perhaps, Resafa). In these cases, however, the settlements were apparently planned and built together with the camps (Konrad 2001, esp. 110–111; Parker 2007, 352). In most other cases where positive archaeological data are at hand, there is evidence of purpose-built, immured camps and forts, comparable to those known from elsewhere in the empire, situated at a near distance of or adjacent to pre-existing cities as, for instance, in the well-known case of Bostra in the province of Arabia (Kennedy and Riley 1990, 125; see now also Tepper et al. 2016 for Caparcotna. Jerusalem cannot, of course, count as a typical case: cf. e.g., Isaac 1992, 279–280 and 427–428; Geva 1984; 2003, 405–422). Camps built for field armies were apparently often established in close relation to existing cities, surely because they made use of the local infrastructure and access to resources (cf. Sartre 2005, 193 for Apamea). In the case of the expeditionary base at Zeugma, however, which is the only such installation that has so far been identified in the field, the military camp was established next to the city and separated from it by walls, comparable to the situation at Bostra (Hartmann and Speidel 2013). Considering that the restricted availability of water and the constraints on mobility (particularly of large armies) imposed by the landscape essentially determined the possible locations of both camps and cities in the Near East, the colocation of cities and camps is unsurprising. Moreover, Roman engineering provided water (dams, cisterns, pools) not only for daily use in the camps but also for irrigation (where that made sense), thus enabling agriculture to thrive in their vicinity (cf. Sartre 2005, 144; Fischer-Genz 2012, 1028).

There is no consensus on the degree to which the Roman army in Syria contributed to the cultural and economic integration of local societies (cf. e.g., Pollard 1996; Stoll 2001; 2001a, 59–76 and 222–268; 2015, 137–207; Haynes 2013, 18–20). Syria was, of course, an urbanized and largely Hellenized region well before the arrival of Roman garrisons. The country no doubt provided supplies and resources and fed the Roman army to a large extent. Yet Syria is also known to have supplied vast numbers of recruits. For not only was it the home of many individual legionary and auxiliary soldiers, but entire auxiliary units were also set up from indigenous communities (mainly under Augustus and during the first century ad) including the Ituraeans, Palmyrenes, Hemesenes, Hamians, Commagenians, and others (Holder 1980, 230–232; Mann 1983, 144–149; Kennedy 1989; Forni 1992, 105; Speidel 1998, 171 and 197–199; Pollard 2000, 114–134 and 138–142; Butcher 2003, 400–401; Weiss 2006). Even Antioch, Damascus, Tyre, Sebaste, and Caesarea contributed units. Service in the Roman army brought many Syrian recruits to far-away places on other frontiers, though most of them appear to have been stationed in the Greek-speaking eastern part of the empire (Forni 1953, 83–85; 1992, 385–390; cf. Pollard 2000, 114–121). Conversely, those soldiers serving in the Roman army of Provincia Syria chiefly hailed from the eastern provinces, most of them from Greater Syria itself. Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 20.8.7 [176]; *BI* 2.13.7 [268]) explicitly reports this to have been true for the Roman army in Judaea in the early empire, and the names of Roman soldiers recorded in the abundant papyri from Dura Europos suggest that local and regional recruitment also prevailed in the early third century (Yon 2017; for Legio IV Scythica, see Speidel 1998, 171). Many soldiers and civilians elsewhere in Roman Syria no doubt also shared the same (or very similar) ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Yet, although regional and local recruitment, even to the legions, was a well-known phenomenon in the East since the early empire and increased over time, Roman recruiting practice (particularly in the case of officers) prevented the emergence of armies that were recruited exclusively from the province in which they were stationed (Speidel 2009, 213–234).

The papyri, parchments, graffiti, inscriptions, frescoes, and other material from Dura Europos and the middle Euphrates also provide much detailed insight into the administration

of Cohors XX Palmyrenorum and the daily life of its soldiers as well as their interaction with the local communities in this period (e.g., Pollard 2000, 44–58; Sartre 2005, 194–197; Haynes 2013, 156–157). Papyri and inscriptions further bear out the role of soldiers and veterans (often as landholders and entrepreneurs) in the local urban economy (Sartre 2005, 196–197; Stoll 2015). Yet, although their role may have been significant in and around their (former) garrison places, on the whole there is nothing to suggest that veterans and their families ever became a dominant economic or social factor in Roman Syria or elsewhere in the Roman Empire (Butcher 2003, 401; Speidel 2009, 275).

Recruitment practices and the apparently frequent physical vicinity of military camps and urban settlements suggest that soldiers of the Roman army in Syria closely interacted with the communities of their garrison places. This, no doubt, was at the roots of the topos of their laxity. Thus, although there was a strong corporate identity among soldiers, local customs appear to have characterized Roman troops in Syria in a number of ways (Speidel 2009, 22–35; 2010; Stoll 2022). Tacitus, for instance, reports how soldiers of Legio III Gallica saluted the rising sun at the Battle of Bedriacum in ad 69, "as was the custom in Syria" (Tac., *Hist*. 3.24). The historian also claims that the Roman soldiers in Syria immediately took Vespasian's side when they heard rumors that Vitellius was planning to relocate them to Germany (Tac., *Hist*. 2.80. For a similar story concerning Judaea see Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 19.9.2 [365]).

A curious phenomenon related to military gravestones in Syria might also be connected to local customs. Among the thousands of inscriptions and portrait reliefs from Palmyra, there is only a tiny number of funerary monuments on which the deceased identify themselves as soldiers or veterans, although thousands of Palmyrenes served in Palmyrene and Roman units over the centuries (Yon 2017, 153; Speidel 2019b). The near absence of soldiers in the epigraphic and iconographic record from Palmyra was therefore hardly accidental. The same virtual non-appearance of soldiers also characterizes the abundance of surviving funerary inscriptions and portraits from Zeugma, although one might have expected to find many gravestones of soldiers of Legio IV Scythica at the presumable site of its fortress.

Conclusions

Although the Roman army in Syria (initially one of the largest in the Roman Empire) was organized and operated in ways that are consistent with what we know about the military organization of other Roman provinces, it was characterized by a number of "Syrian" traits that set it apart from armies in other Roman provinces. Though merely accidental, it also differs in terms of documentation. For the extraordinary abundance of written and material evidence from Dura provides an extremely rich source for countless aspects pertaining to auxiliary units in the early third century, and the epigraphic and archaeological evidence from Apamea and Zeugma provides unparalleled insights into the history, logistics, and organization of field armies. However, the extent of the local and regional characteristics of the Roman army in Syria is not exceptional as it compares perfectly well with that known from armies in other provinces of the Roman Empire (see, e.g., Haensch 2012).

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CHAPTER 17

ROAD AND TRANSPORT NETWORKS IN HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN SYRIA

ADAM PAŽOUT

Introduction

This chapter discusses terrestrial transport networks and waterways in the Hellenistic and Roman Syria. The discussion is focused on the main travel corridors, and the environmental constraints that shaped them. Additional key topics covered are issues of continuity and change of transport networks from the (pre-)Hellenistic period, and the role played by imperial powers in shaping the Syrian landscape and its transport network.

Sources

There are only limited archaeological sources for the road system in the Hellenistic and early Roman period, as the majority of roads were not paved. In certain regions (Judaean Desert, Negev, Jordanian Highlands), mountain passes were cut in the Iron Age and continued to be used into the Roman period (Harel 1967; Ben David 2009; 2017). The surface of these roads was cleared of stones, and these were reused as curbs delimiting the road. Other roads were presumably extensively remodeled and overlaid in the Roman and subsequent periods. In certain places (Nahr el-Kalb pass, Euphrates between Zeugma and Samosata), rock-cut inscriptions and reliefs indicate the course of the ancient routes (Goodchild 1949; Comfort, Abadi-Reynal, and Ergec 2000). In the absence of paved sections of roads, a contextual-landscape approach offers a method to reconstruct the transport networks. Dorsey (1991) used archaeological evidence for settlement patterns in Iron Age Israel, coupled with biblical textual sources, to reconstruct the road system in the southern Levant. Apart from settlement patterns, rural fortifications, garrisons, and city foundations (colonies) are commonly used for the same purpose. However, fortifications' functions and relation to the road system are often disputed (Shatzman 1991; Pažout 2021). A firm connection between the road network and fortifications can be established only in the Roman imperial period.

Ancient historians and geographers are a principal source for information about the transport networks. Itineraries of royal travels and military campaigns of the Seleucids, Ptolemies, and Roman emperors reveal patterns of movement in a given region, although interpretation of these sources is often ambiguous (Kosmin 2014, 142–147). Such itineraries can hint at existing infrastructure (road stations, water sources) necessary to sustain a royal court or field armies on the march. Less frequently, historical sources directly reference construction of forts and garrisons to protect certain routes, such as Bacchides's fortifications built on the approaches to Jerusalem to contain the Maccabean Revolt in the mid-second century BC (1 Macc. 9:50–52; Roll 1996). Extremely valuable are works of Josephus Flavius (*Antiquities of the Jews* and *Jewish War*) for Judaea and Arabia. His account, focusing on the late Hellenistic–early Roman period, provides detailed descriptions of geography and human settlement, coupled with accounts of military expeditions, that allow us to reconstruct the

main itineraries. Geographers, such as Strabo, Pliny the Elder, and Claudius Ptolemy often indicate distances (on the ground or in time) between various places, implying direct connections between them. Less frequently they note the existence of transport infrastructure such as roads, road stations, bridges, and navigability of rivers. The only surviving road itinerary available to us for the early Roman period is that of Isidore of Charax (*Parthian Stations*), from the end of the first century bc, describing an overland trade route from Antioch to Arachosia (in modern Afghanistan).

From the first century ad there is increasing evidence for the road system in the form of milestones and surviving sections of built roads. The earliest milestone evidence dates to the reign of Nero (ad 56), but large-scale road building started only under Vespasian in the years following the Jewish War and annexation of Commagene in ad 72. The building activity continued intensively in the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian and culminated in the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (Isaac 2022). Milestones were being erected into the fourth century ad. The series of Diocletianic/Tetrarchic milestones from the turn of the third/fourth century ad indicate heightened activity in the pre-desert and desert regions with construction of new roads for a new system of fortifications (Strata Diocletiana between Palmyra and Damascus). However, the milestone evidence is very uneven. Out of around one thousand known inscribed milestones from the three provinces (Syria, Judaea, Arabia) seven hundred come from Judaea and Arabia (Kolb 2019).

Official itineraries and cartographic documents improve our knowledge about the Roman road system and state transport system *cursus publicus*. Among the most important is the *Antonine Itinerary*, dated to the late second/early third century ad (Löhborg 2010), and the unprecedented ancient map, the so-called *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Talbert 2012). From the fourth century on, a genre of pilgrims' itineraries develops, describing their travels to the Holy Land (e.g., the Bordeaux Pilgrim).

There is bias in scholarship toward the study of Roman roads, thanks to more prominent and tangible evidence (milestones, surviving paved roads). Whereas for the Hellenistic road system, scholars rely mainly on the circumstantial evidence from historical sources, and by analogy contextualizing archaeological evidence (settlement patterns). Presumably, many of the pre-Roman roads were reused and repaved by the Romans, obscuring earlier remains. The assumption stands that due to the high degree of urbanization and high settlement density in the Iron Age–Hellenistic period, a dense road network continually developed, and this system was not profoundly altered by the Romans.

History of Research

The ancient roads and Roman milestones were being described and discussed in the region starting with the travelers in the nineteenth century (e.g., J. L. Burckhardt, U. J. Seetzen). Milestones were systematically collected in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (*CIL* III; 1873–1902) and more recently in the LIRE database (Kaše, Heřmánková, and Sobotková 2021). Thomsen (1917) provides the first (and so far, only) synthetic work on the Roman road system and milestones in the Levant. Systematic research of roads begins with the *Survey of Western Palestine* (Conder and Kitchener 1882–1888), mapping milestones and sections of surviving road pavement. Further exploration was done by G. Schumacher in southern Syria and Transjordan (Schumacher 1888; 1889) and Brünnow and Domaszewski (1905–1909) in Transjordan. Poidebard (1934), and working later with Mouterde (1945), pioneered aerial archaeology with their survey of the desert *limes* in the Syrian steppe and on the Aleppo Plateau east of the Nusayriyeh Mountains. In addition to aerial survey, many of the sites and roads were re-surveyed and verified on the ground. However, their dating without further

archaeological investigation is still uncertain. Since then, major works have appeared on the Roman road system of Judaea (Roll 1983), including publication of *Tabula Imperii Romani* (Roll 1994). Detailed investigations of selected main roads in Judaea were also published (Isaac and Roll 1982; Fischer, Isaac, and Roll 1996). For the province of Arabia, major works appeared by Mittman (1970) and Kennedy (2004). The central and southern sections of the Via Nova Traiana were treated by Graf (1997) and Abudanah et al. (2016; 2020). In Syria, new investigations on the Roman road system were carried out by Bauzou (1989), including focused regional studies on the Hawran (Bauzou 1985; 2004), Strata Diocletiana (1993), and northern section of the Via Nova Traiana (Bauzou 1998). The most recent summary on the transport networks in northern Syria can be found in *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 15 (Todt and Vest 2014).

A bias toward the study of milestones and roads in Judaea, Arabia, and southern Syria can be observed. Investigations in Syria were focused on individual roads or cities (Euphrates frontier: Comfort 2008; Mitford 2018, Apamea: Balty 2016, Strata Diocletiana, etc.) and a new global synthesis is missing. Investigations are hampered by modern state boundaries (e.g., Cyrrhestice on the Turkish–Syrian border) as well as armed conflicts and political instability.

Road Network

The natural environment can be considered a primary factor shaping human movement, either allowing it or restricting/prohibiting it. However, ancient populations possessed the capacity for altering the landscape, including terrestrial communications, to their advantage.

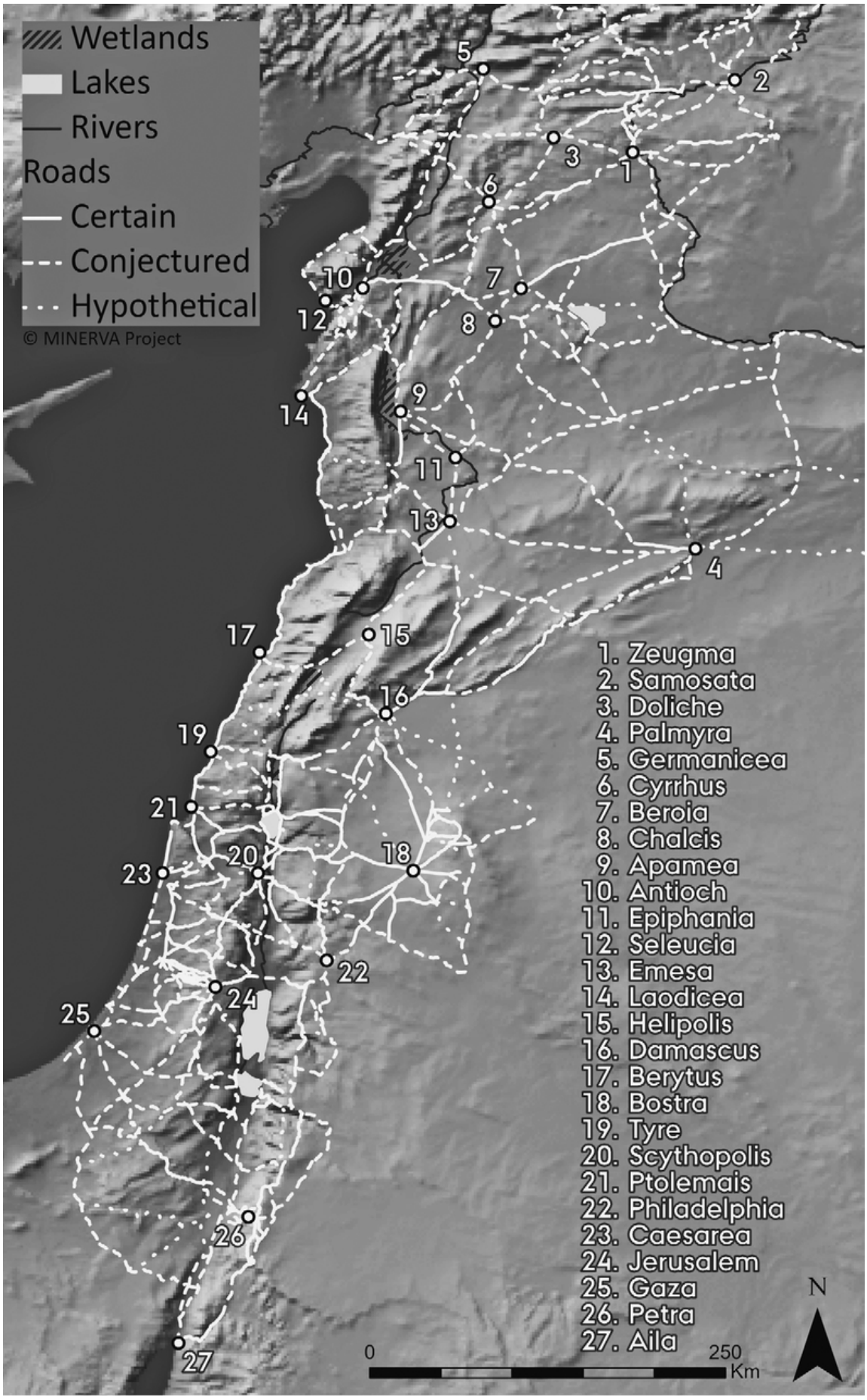
Wetlands
Lakes
Rivers
Roads
Certain
Conjectured
Hypothetical
© MINERVA Project
1. Zeugma
2. Samosata
3. Doliche
4. Palmyra
5. Germanicea
6. Cyrrhus
7. Beroia
8. Chalcis
9. Apamea
10. Antioch
11. Epiphania
12. Seleucia
13. Emesa
14. Laodicea
15. Helipolis
16. Damascus
17. Berytus
18. Bostra
19. Tyre
20. Scythopolis
21. Ptolemais
22. Philadelphia
23. Caesarea
24. Jerusalem
25. Gaza
26. Petra
27. Aila
0
250
Km
N

FIGURE 17.1. Road system of Syria in the late Roman period. Road categories refer to the spatial accuracy of Roman period road layouts. Map by Adam Pažout and the MINERVA Project.

The road network (fig. 17.1) discussed here is approached with methodological tools developed within the archaeogeographical analysis of past road networks (Watteaux 2017). The goal is to better understand the development of the road system in diachronic perspective and within a larger historical context. It allows macro- and micro-scale analysis of both long- and short-distance connections within their territorial context. Thus, an *itinerary* is a connection between two points that is associated with *flux*—movement of people between these two points. A *layout* is the shape of the itinerary on the ground, represented as a two-dimensional line on a map, and assimilated to a road. *Itineraries* may have great durability over time, but they can be subject to change as new centers develop and old ones decline, altering the flux of people. Other factors can influence the flux and in turn also the itineraries (new political borders, changes in economy and long-distance trade, warfare, etc.). *Layouts* are more dynamic as new roads can be built replacing the old ones. Typically, layouts are composed of roads of different origin, entering the direction of the itinerary. Multiple layouts can be associated with a single itinerary.

Movement Corridors and Movement Obstacles

Syria is on the north and west defined by mountain ranges formed along the East Anatolian Fault and the Dead Sea Transform. The Taurus Mountains in the north could be crossed to Cappadocia over a small number of passes: Darb el-Kankarun on the upper Pyramus River, and Darb el-Ḥadaṯ north-east of Germanicea. Another crossing followed the Nymphaius River from the Euphrates close to Samosata. The Amanus Mountains extend from the Mediterranean Sea at Seleucia north-west to Germanicea, forming a border with Cilicia. It could be crossed at Haçbel-Darb el-ʿAyn southwest of Germanicea, at Hasanbeyli-Darband el-Marri west of Nicopolis-Islahiye, and finally at Belen Pass, the famous Syrian Gates (Pylai Syriai), northwest of Antioch. The ʿAintab Plateau extends from the piedmont of the Taurus and Amanus Mountains to the Euphrates Valley in the east and south to the Aleppo Plateau. It is an undulating region composed of limestone and volcanic hills and ranges with communication corridors along valleys that feed the Euphrates, in the north–south direction around Samosata, turning east–west in the central part. The southern part of the plateau, between Cyrrhus and Zeugma, fades into the open expanse of the Aleppo Plateau. Between the ʿAintab Plateau and the Amanus Mountains lies a wide valley of the Karasu River, creating an easy travel corridor from Germanicea to Antioch, where it joins the lower Orontes Valley that flows into the sea. A major obstacle to movement in antiquity was the ʿAmuq Lake (Amik Gölü), northeast of Antioch, swelling to almost 400 km^2 of marshland during the winter months. It limited access to narrow strips of land along the mountains.

Along the Mediterranean coast extends a complex of mountain ranges limiting access between the sea and the interior. Jebel ʾAqraʿ (Casius) and Jebel Nusayriya (Bargylus) rise above Antioch and follow the northern Syrian coast to the Homs Gap—one of the main east–west movement corridors formed by the Eleutherus River (Nahr el-Kabir). Its western coastal piedmont is largely flat and wide allowing easy movement. In the north it can be crossed in several places between Laodicea on the coast and Antioch. South of the Homs Gap lie the Lebanon Mountains. They can be crossed over several east–west ridges or valleys mainly in the southern part between Berytus and Tyre. To the south follow the Galilean Highlands, that allow east–west travel along several valleys (Beit ha-Kerem, Beit Netofa Valleys). Yezre'el

Valley then divides Galilee from the highlands of Judaea and Samaria, connecting the coastal plain of ʿAkko-Ptolemaïs with the Jordan Valley and Transjordan. Samaria and Judaea are easily crossed following numerous east–west valleys, and from north to south are traversed by a corridor following the watershed. The Palestinian coastal plain widens toward the south where it turns into a sandy desert beyond Gaza.

East of the coastal range lies on the north–south axis, a series of valleys created by the tectonic rift. There flow the main perennial rivers of Syria, feeding several lakes and marshlands formed in pull-apart basins. From north to south these are the Orontes, flowing through the el-Ghab marshes between Apamea and Jisr esh-Shoughour to ʿAmuq Lake, and through Antioch to the sea; the Bekaa Valley (Marsyas) between Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains with extensive marshes in its southern part; the upper Jordan Valley with Lake Huleh, whose waters flow into the Sea of Galilee; the Jordan Valley itself, squeezed between the Judaean and Jordanian Highlands, that empties into the Dead Sea. South of the Dead Sea, desertic Wadi ʿArabah extends to the Red Sea. The second chain of mountain ranges on the eastern side of the valleys is most easily traversable in the north along the Orontes and Afrin (Oinoparas) Valley. There, the limestones hills of Kurd Dağı, Jebel Simʿan, Jebel Barisha, and Jebel ez-Zawiye do not inhibit movement. The Anti-Lebanon range, however, can be crossed only through the Barada Valley between Zabadani (Abila Lysaniou) and Damascus. The passes of the Jordan Valley and Wadi ʿArabah are steep and few, and in the past they required modifications. The passes either follow a combination of small east–west valleys and ridges (e.g., Tyre–Caesarea Paneas, Pella–Gerasa) or they climb through narrow switchback roads (e.g., the Zoar Ascent south of the Dead Sea, Namala and Rubaiʿ Passes west of Petra).

After these mountain chains, the terrain to the east is mostly gently undulating or flat (the Aleppo Plateau). Several wetlands are found on the plateau: el-Ruj to the northeast of el-Ghab Plain; to the southeast of Chalkis; and endorheic Jaboul Lake southeast of Beroia-Aleppo. With lowering precipitation, the landscape gradually changes to steppe and desert. The lack of water sources then becomes a major limiting factor defining movement corridors. Aleppo Plateau is divided from the Syrian Desert proper by a series of mountain ranges extending from Damascus to the northeast of Palmyra, with movement possible on either side of its piedmont or through numerous passes. In the southern Syrian Hawran, the volcanic field of el-Leja traditionally formed a barrier to movement. The Jebel el-Druz, on the other hand, another volcanic region, has been a place of dense settlement since the Iron Age. In the rest of the Hawran and Jordanian Highlands, major obstacles for movement were, paradoxically, numerous east–west river valleys, that formed deeply incised, almost impassable canyons (Ruqqad and Yarmouk in the north; Wadi el-Ḥasa and Wadi Mujib in the south).

Overall, the main movement corridors are concentrated on a north–south axis, parallel to the mountain ranges, which limit east–west communications. The ʿAintab Plateau provides mainly east–west movement corridors while the Aleppo Plateau permits movement in all cardinal directions. In the southern Levant, terrain permits more transversal connections, except for limited access across the Jordan Valley. Wetlands limit movement mainly along the Orontes River (ʿAmuq, el-Ghab) and in the upper Jordan Valley (Lake Huleh).

Itineraries of Northern Syria

Antioch occupies a strategic position, where several movement corridors converge: through the Syrian Gates to Cilicia, the Karasu Valley to the north, Oinoparos-Afrin Valley to the east, Orontes Valley to the south and to the Mediterranean coast. The itinerary through the Karasu Valley connected Antioch to Nicopolis (controlling Hasanbeyli Pass) and Germanicea. From

Nicopolis an easterly itinerary led to Doliche, and south-east to Cyrrhus. From Germanicea led two itineraries: eastward to Samosata, and northeast along the piedmont of the Taurus to Cappadocia. Eastward from Antioch, the main itinerary ran through the Oinoparos-Afrin Valley to Cyrrhus and Zeugma. A more southerly itinerary diverged in the ʿAmuq Plain to Chalcis-Beroia-Hierapolis (Manbij)-Europos Carchemish. Alternatively, from Hierapolis the itinerary might have continued directly to a crossing of the Euphrates, known as Caeciliana in the Roman period. North–south itineraries in Commagene and Cyrrhestice are few and of secondary importance. A central position is occupied by Doliche and Cyrrhus where a north–south itinerary intersects with the major east–west ones. The roads along both banks of the Euphrates between Samosata and Zeugma supplemented river-bound traffic, but most of the surviving evidence for its formalization and use dates to the Roman period, when it was the principal communication artery for the Roman forts along the river (Mitford 2018). Samosata–Arsameia on the Euphrates itinerary was established in the Hellenistic period and was likely extended upriver to Malatya during the Roman rule.

The development of Seleucid Tetrapolis (Antioch, Seleucia, Laodicea, Apamea) promoted itineraries centered on these cities, as these regions appear to lack major centers in the Persian period. The itinerary Antioch–Laodicea developed several layouts through the Bargylus Mountains, marked by Roman milestones, bridges, and later Byzantine churches and monasteries. Antioch–Apamea also offers multiple possible layouts: through Daphne crossing the northern Cassius Mountains to the Orontes Valley around Jisr esh-Shoughour; or following the Orontes skirting the Cassius from the north. Both layouts then converge and follow the el-Ghab Valley. The reconstruction of the layout is complicated by uncertain identification of the road station Niaccaba in the Antonine Itinerary, placed either at Jisr esh-Shoughour or Kafr ʿAqab (Dussaud 1927, 156; *TIB* 15, "Niaccaba"). From Antioch east, the main itinerary ran to Chalkis-Qinnasrin following the Orontes to a bridge at Gephyra (Jist el-Hadid/Demirköprü) and crossing Jebel Barisha. Chalkis was an important crossroad in the interior, where itineraries from the north (Cyrrhus) and east (Hierapolis) converged. South of Chalcis, the main itinerary in the Hellenistic and Roman periods was diverted to Apamea.

Both Laodicea and Apamea are starting points of major north–south itineraries. From Laodicea along the coast the itinerary connects the main cities of Phoenicia (Balanea, Arados, Tripolis, Berytus, Sidon, Tyre). From Apamea there are two: the first following the rift valley to Raphanea, Laodicea ad Libanum (Tell Nebi Mend), and Heliopolis-Baʿalbek in the Marsyas Valley. From Helipolis a road leads to both Berytus on the coast and to Damascus in the interior. The second itinerary from Apamea closely follows the Orontes River and eastern piedmont of the Anti-Lebanon through Epiphania-Hama, Emesa-Homs, and finally Damascus. East–west connection between these longitudinal itineraries was possible mainly through the Homs Gap on the Arca–Laodicea ad Libanum axis. Alternative connection through the Bargylus was possible between Antarados–Yahmour–Safita–Raphanea–Emesa. However, this itinerary may have gained prominence only in the Roman period, with construction of a legionary camp at Raphanea in the first century ad (Gschwind et al. 2009).

Itineraries of Southern Syria

Itineraries of southern Syria closely resemble those in the north, with major longitudinal (north–south) corridors and numerous transversal (east–west) connections. An itinerary along the coast connected Syria with Egypt. The main branch ran from Tyre through Ptolemaïs-ʿAkko inland to Megiddo Junction in the western Yezreʾel Valley, avoiding Mount Carmel on the southern side of the Bay of ʿAkko. From Megiddo the road turned back to the coast to Caesarea Maritima (former Straton's Tower) and continued following kurkar ridges to Apollonia

and Ioppe (Yafo). Beyond Ioppe it avoided a line of sand dunes and ran farther inland to Iamnia, Azotus (Ashdod), Ascalon (Ashqelon), and Gaza. A parallel layout followed the coast below the Carmel through Sycamina and Dora, joining the main branch in Caesarea. In the upper Jordan Valley the main itinerary ran from Paneas (refounded as Ceasarea Philippi in AD 3) to the Sea of Galilee, where Tiberias was founded ca. AD 20 by Herod Antipas, and further to Scythopolis-Beth Sheʾan, and Jericho/the Dead Sea. In the Transjordan, a main itinerary was that connecting Damascus with Aila on the Red Sea, the so-called "King's Highway," running through Aere-Sanamayn, Neue-Nawa, Adraha-Deraʿ, Gerasa, Philadelphia-Amman, Madaba, Characmoba-Karak, and Petra. This itinerary had been a stable commercial route at least from the Bronze Age. However, since it had to cross several of the deep canyons mentioned above, various layouts developed in the Wadi Mujib and Wadi el-Hasa, with a parallel route avoiding these canyons altogether further east in the desert (Kloner and Ben David 2003; Borstad 2008). Bostra developed as a focal point where east–west and north–south itineraries converged from the Arabian Desert and Syria. A north–south itinerary, of local importance, linked since prehistory the Samaritan and Judaean Highlands. Starting at Shechem-Nablus it followed the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea south to Gophna, Jerusalem, and Hebron.

Transversal connections in southern Syria are more numerous, thanks to topography, but some limits are put on communications across the Dead Sea Fault. Tyre and Damascus were connected through Caesarea-Paneas. Ptolemaïs-ʿAkko was the terminus of two itineraries—first through upper Galilee to the Sea of Galilee, the Golan, and to Damascus; and second through lower Galilee: Sepphoris, Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, Gadara, Adraha, and finally to Bostra. Roads from Caesarea and Ptolemaïs meet at Megiddo Junction from where the itinerary continues through the Yezreʾel Valley to Scythopolis, Pella, Gerasa, and Bostra. Another major itinerary connects the harbor of Ioppe with Lydda-Lod, Jerusalem, Jericho, crossing the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea to Esbus and Philadelphia. Gaza and Ascalon were connected through Eleutheropolis-Beth Guvrin to Jerusalem and so to the previous itinerary to Philadelphia.

Desert Itineraries

Desert itineraries are in most respects extensions of the east–west transversal itineraries connecting the Mediterranean ports with commercial centers in the Arabian and Syrian Desert. Palmyra is a focal point of at least three itineraries: directly east through Bir ʾAbyad, Khirbet et-Tiyas, Betproclis-Furqlus, to Emesa. Another branched at Bir ʾAbyad to the south-west through Heliaramia-Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi, Nazala-Qaryatayn, Thelsea-Dumyar, to Damascus, skirting the Palmyrene range along its northern piedmont. And northwest through Jebel Bilas to Occaraba-ʿUqayribat, Theleda-Tell ʿAda, to Apamea or Epiphania-Hama. On the Damascus–Palmyra itinerary, a new layout was established by Diocletian to the south of the Palmyrene range, the so-called Strata Diocletiana, dotted with forts and hydraulic installations for collection of rainwater. The main commercial itinerary then proceeded from Palmyra eastward to Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, or to Anath farther downstream, and to central Mesopotamia. Other itineraries connected Palmyra with Chalcis and Beroia through Seriane-Ithriya; and with Sura-el-Suriyya on the Euphrates through Aracha-ʾAraq, Adada-Sukhne, Oresa-Tayibe, and Resafa, skirting the western piedmont of Jebel Bishri. The last itinerary might have been a military road, suggested by a milestone of Vespasian (Konrad 1999).

In the south, one of the main itineraries was a commercial route through Wadi Sirhan to Azraq Oasis from whence the itinerary continued either north to Bostra and Damascus, or west to Gerasa or Philadelphia. Nabateans heavily promoted the commercial route through

northern Hijaz to their capital in Petra and thence across the Negev Desert to Gaza—one of the major outlets for Arabian trade in the Mediterranean. The Petra–Gaza road was equipped with numerous road stations, some of which turned into full-fledged cities during Roman rule (Oboda, Elusa). An itinerary ran from Jerusalem through Wadi ʿArabah to Aila on the Red Sea, with one branch through Hebron and Mampsis, and a second through the Judaean Desert to the Dead Sea. It was probably composed of parallel branches also on either side of Wadi ʿArabah (Roll 2007). Secondary east–west transversal itineraries existed, connecting Gaza with the Dead Sea via Tel Beer Sheva, Characmoba-Karak with Wadi ʿArabah through Zoar, or Wadi Faynan with its mining district.

Waterways

Because of the hot climate and sparse precipitation, Syria has only a few perennial rivers with enough discharge to support fluvial transport. Historical and archaeological evidence singles out four main waterways: the Orontes and Euphrates Rivers, and the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Except for the Euphrates, which supported commerce and military logistics to Mesopotamia, all waterways were of only local importance.

Orontes was navigable at least along its lower course up to Darkoush, where it enters a narrow valley through Jebel Barisha, and a wooden quay was found nearby (Peña 1995). Historical evidence suggests that ʿAmuq Lake was navigable, too. An inscription dated to the year ad 75 informs us of legionaries involved in canal construction between the Karasu, ʿAmuq Lake, and the Orontes, presumably for river traffic (van Berchem 1983).

Euphrates was navigable only seasonally during the summer months. For the rest of the year, excessive amounts of water (winter rains, melting snow in spring) prevent safe water transport. Another obstacle was rapids located between Melitene and Samosata that had to be avoided by overland portage. Between Samosata and Zeugma, both downstream and upstream transport was probably practiced, although towpaths are not continuous, often interrupted by cliffs. Historically, in the nineteenth/twentieth century, cargo was transported only downstream, with empty boats returning upriver (Comfort, Abadi-Reynal, and Ergec 2000; Mitford 2018). Further downstream from Zeugma, the water likely allowed both down- and upstream transport. Below Zeugma, on the right, Syrian, bank, other settlements that could have served as river ports were located: Europos Carchemish, Caeciliana somewhere around the confluence of the Sajour and the Euphrates, Jebel Khalid in the Hellenistic period, Eragiza-Tell el-Hajj, Barbalissus-Tell Meskene, Athis/Neocaesarea-Dibsi Faraj, Sura, and Dura Europos. Between Sura and Dura, several military forts were established in the late Roman and Byzantine periods (Zenobie, ʿQreiye-ʿAyyash), likely utilizing the river as their primary means of transport.

There is plenty of archaeological and textual evidence for transport and fishing on the Sea of Galilee in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Wachsmann 1990, 113; Zwickel 2013). Investigations (Nun 1988; de Luca and Lena 2015) revealed fifteen anchorages on the lake, in addition to a harbor in Tiberias. Two of these anchorages were probably connected with other major cities in the region—Hippos in the east and Gadara in the southeast. A small vessel of little more than 8 m was found buried in the sediment inside Magdala harbor. It is probably a typical example of boats in use in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Wachsmann 1990).

There is archaeological evidence for a total of seven anchorages on the shores of the Dead Sea dated from the Iron Age to the Byzantine period (Hadas 2011). Passenger and cargo traffic was probably dominant in addition to bitumen extraction, as no fish live in the lake.

Development of Transport Networks

We may now turn to the issue of continuity and change of the itineraries that made up the transport network of Syria and how it was influenced by interventions of the Hellenistic monarchies and the Romans.

The implantation of Hellenistic foundations likely changed the flux of people on a regional scale. However, the majority of these foundations in northern Syria were built on pre-Hellenistic settlements (except for Cyrrhus; Cohen 2006, 181–182), so the Seleucids were establishing their presence along existing itineraries, which in themselves developed along natural movement corridors. Only the layouts of these itineraries might have changed with shifting gravity of the main sites in their microregions (e.g., Zincirli-Samʿal and Islahiye-Nicopolis in the Karasu Valley, Alalakh/Antioch on the ʿAmuq Plain). The main change in the configuration of the road network was probably connected with the foundation of Apamea, that diverted the main north–south itinerary between Commagene/Cyrrhestike to Damascus closer to the middle Orontes Valley. It also gave prominence to the whole Orontes Valley route from Antioch, as Apamea was the main staging point for Seleucid armies marching south. Antioch–Laodicea may be another example of a previously less important itinerary, rising to prominence after the foundation of new cities. Hellenistic land division and the associated new layout of the road network in the hinterland of Laodicea (Dodinet, Leblanc, and Vallat 1994) hints at large landscape alterations introduced by the imperial administration.

In southern Syria, the picture might be slightly different. Settlement continuity between Iron Age/Persian and Hellenistic periods is markedly weaker in the Jordan Valley and Transjordan, so most Ptolemaic and Seleucid foundations were established on deserted sites. But their distribution is still not random—they are placed along the natural movement corridor through the Jordan Valley (Hippos, Philoteria-Beth Yerah, Scythopolis). Scythopolis is then a crossroads with an east–west route from the Mediterranean through the Yezreʿel Valley to Pella, Gerasa, and Philadelphia, or northwest to Gadara, Abila, and Bostra. It appears then, that the Hellenistic foundations in southern Syria also follow older, established itineraries, or at least "re-invent" them along the natural movement corridors.

A stable itinerary did not develop through the rift valley connecting the Marsyas (Bekaa)–Jordan Valleys in the Hellenistic–Roman periods. Marshes existed in the southern Marsyas Valley, but it was possible to avoid them along the piedmont of the Lebanon Mounts. and following the upper Litani River to enter the upper Jordan Valley. Antiochus III certainly used this corridor during the Fourth and Fifth Syrian Wars (Pol. 5.45–46; 16.18). Natural obstacles, absence of major settlements, and presence of the Ituraean tribes likely prevented flux of people in this area. Alternatively, this gap might reflect the Ptolemaic–Seleucid political boundary that prevented the development of a flux through the Marsyas Valley, a situation that became solidified well into later periods.

The Roman road building was focused on main arteries with military-strategic significance for army movements, logistics, and exercising territorial control (Isaac 1990; Chevallier 1997). Legionary camps are built along main itineraries—Zeugma and Samosata, Raphanea, Megiddo Junction-Legio, Bostra, and Jerusalem all lie either on major waterways or crossroads of major north–south and east–west itineraries. The Romans inherited an already well-developed road network and their major innovation was in the sphere of road paving and engineering, often laying new layouts of existing itineraries. New engineered roads were constructed on the ascents along the Via Nova in Arabia and between the Dead Sea and Jordanian Highlands. In some places, new roads were built where none existed before—e.g., through Leja

(Trachonitis) in southern Syria a new military road with watchtowers and garrisons was built to improve security in a region notoriously infested with bandits. Strata Diocletiana on the southern side of the Palmyrene mountains was a similar military road between Damascus and Palmyra, made possible through organized investment in building and maintaining forts and rainwater-collecting facilities in a mostly waterless region. However, when the Roman military presence ended, and with it imperial investment in the road infrastructure, these military roads were abandoned.

Roman centuriation altered the landscape in a similar way as did the Hellenistic land division, but its traces are well documented only in several places—chiefly in the region of Emesa and Bostra (Abdulkarim and Olesti Vila 2007). Centuriation laid out new roads and incorporated old ones, but to what extent is unclear from the available evidence. Laying out of new roads as axes of land division might be still extant in the southern-central Golan Heights and southern Syria, but further research is needed.

Changing settlement patterns however influenced the disappearance or at least partial abandonment of some itineraries. The Bronze–Iron Age itinerary Megiddo–Tel Hatzor–Damascus through Jisr Banat Yaʿqub crossing over the Jordan disintegrated with the abandonment of Megiddo and Hatzor during the Hellenistic period. The lower Galilee section was reoriented to Sepphoris and Tiberias and the upper Jordan Valley section to Cadasa (Tel Qedesh) in the Hellenistic period and later to Caesarea Paneas. The Jisr Banat Yaʿqub crossing lost its importance sometime during the late Hellenistic–early Roman period, with main roads located on the Tyre–Caesarea Paneas–Damascus or Sea of Galilee–Neue (Nawa) axes. The roads—layouts of the abandoned itineraries—likely did not cease to exist but were probably relegated to second-order roads of local importance, only to emerge later under different circumstances: Jisr Banat Yaʿqub is again the main Jordan crossing from the medieval period to the twentieth century.

The changes in the settlement patterns were sometimes instituted from above, but it was shown that these changes influenced only layouts of existing itineraries. Hellenistic dynasties, and later the Romans, promoted existing settlements or founded new ones close to the old settlements along existing routes. Long-term bottom-up settlement processes had more influence on the stability and persistence of the itineraries, but the dynamics between settlements, transport networks, and socio-economic circumstances are not easy to disentangle. The central political power might have promoted new itineraries and instituted new layouts, but these were often abandoned as soon as the political situation changed and the new circumstances did not allow continuing maintenance of the infrastructure, as can be seen with Roman military installations and roads in the frontier areas.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the MINERVA Project funded by a Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond (DFF) Sapere Aude research leadership grant (0163-00060B) and by the Danish National Research Foundation under the grant DNRF119—Centre of Excellence for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet).

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CHAPTER 18

THE JEWISH WARS, THE ROMAN EMPERORS, AND T HEIR IMPACT

KIMBERLEY CZAJKOWSKI

Introduction

Judaea could be said to have been the problem child of the empire in the first couple of centuries AD. This part of the Near East attracted broad attention, and not for positive reasons: within one hundred years the province was host to not one but two revolts that had a lasting impact on its administration, and much wider implications for the position of the Jewish people throughout the ancient world. Indeed, a marked shift in treatments of Jews can be detected in imperial policy in the aftermath of the revolts: first in the imposition of the Jewish tax, and later in the ban on circumcision. This broader shift in the perception and treatment of both Judaea and the Jewish people is intricately connected to the changes that were imposed at a local level in the aftermath of the rebellions.

This chapter considers the Jewish revolts and their impact from the perspective of the Roman imperial rulers. The Near East underwent considerable restructuring at this time: military presence was increased, in no small part because there was a growing tendency toward administration by direct rule after a long reliance on the use of dependent kingdoms. Commagene and Emesa, for example, were both incorporated into the province of Syria in this period; Arabia was annexed as a province in ad 106; and Cappadocia was upgraded to a consular province with two legions (Millar 2001, 80–111 remains an excellent analysis of the changes). Parthia was an ever-present concern (see Edwell, chapter 22, this volume), and tensions came to a head in Trajan's reign. Yet Judaea was the section of Syria that underwent vital restructuring because of the revolts specifically and is thus the focus of this chapter. While some of the changes that occurred at a local level were not atypical of the broader treatment of the Near East at this point, Judaea and its inhabitants received special attention as a result of the revolts. Furthermore, the Jewish Wars had an effect on imperial attitudes toward the Jewish people more generally and thus on Jews living elsewhere in the empire. These wider implications for the Jewish people will therefore receive some attention to the extent that these affected imperial policy. To this end, the Diasporan revolt (ad 116–117) will receive brief reference here. While the case that this involved the Judaean heartland remains unconvincing, and thus this revolt in general lies outside the concerns of this volume, it had a significant impact on Roman imperial perceptions that affected relations with Judaea and its inhabitants. Its effects are therefore an important factor in understanding the climate in which the later Bar Kochba uprising occurred.

This chapter will therefore delineate the consequences of the revolts at a local level and outline their relation to wider imperial perceptions and policy. The shift in attitudes toward Judaea and its repeatedly rebellious population had a significant impact on this small territory and on Jews elsewhere in the empire; this fits with broader changes in the Near East, but the latter were not so closely tied to the Jewish Wars.

The Flavians and the First Revolt

In AD 71, Rome was engulfed by the celebration of a triumph. Titus and Vespasian jointly paraded through the city, preceded by the spoils of war: a large number of captives, and items from the Jerusalem Temple. This was a grand announcement of the new dynasty, with not only the victors but also Titus's younger brother, Domitian, out on display. The triumph constituted a large-scale, public declaration of the new family in charge based on their capacity to defeat a foreign enemy in full and proper triumphal style. Josephus preserves a lengthy account of the procession (Jos., *BI* 7.132–157), and this was later to be depicted on the reliefs on the Arch of Titus. Rebellious subjects had been defeated and tamed; Roman rule in the region had been magnificently reimposed; the territory of the empire had been taken back and secured from those struggling against it. This became the foundation story of the Flavian dynasty.

The "foreign enemy" was key. Vespasian had, of course, come to power through a bloody civil war of which Rome had not seen the like since Actium. The Year of the Four Emperors had resulted in a great number of casualties and had wrought havoc on the city of Rome itself, which needed significant restoration after the Flavian victory. Tacitus's description of the period as, "rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civic struggles, horrible even in peace" (*Hist.* 1.1) should not be viewed as purely an exaggeration; Suetonius also describes the state as "tottering and almost in ruins" at the start of Vespasian's reign (*Vesp.* 8). The opportunity to advertise a foreign victory at the start of his rule, thus distracting from the problem of the war against the internal enemy, gave Rome a chance to glory in a military success in the immediate aftermath of civil bloodshed. This was a gift to the new dynasty, and one of which the Flavians duly took full advantage (see Mason 2016, 4–43; Goodman 2003, 24).

Yet while the revolt became a cornerstone of the establishment of a dynasty right at the center of the empire, its connection with Rome at the outset is less straightforward. There is much to be said for the idea that this was not initially an anti-Roman rebellion: much of the fighting, and the causes themselves, arose out of internal disputes in Jewish society (most recently see Mason 2016, 200, 278; see also Price 1992 and Goodman 1987 on internal problems as causes; Berlin and Overman 2003 more generally on the revolt). Some groups were certainly vying for independence from Rome: for example, the Zealots seem to have been aiming for this, as is demonstrated by the coinage minted once they had occupied Jerusalem, especially the חרות ציון ("Freedom of Zion") legend on the Year Two coins. But in general, although Rome was an issue within the local context, the origins of the revolt most likely lay in local problems. The appointment of Vespasian by Nero to deal with the uprising in AD 66 is indicative that Rome was, however, worried about it—after all, peace in the provinces was a key concern and a necessity if Rome was to get her taxes.

While we should be cautious about miscalculating the initial importance of the war, its consequences were indeed severe. From that point Judaea was on the radar of the inhabitants of the entire empire. Put simply, this backwater of the Roman Empire now became important in imperial ideology. While we can point to previous examples of the prominence of the Judaean–Roman connection—Herod and Augustus's close relationship perhaps being the most obvious—this should not be overstated. In that example, there is little real reason to think that Herod was particularly prominent in the wider imperial imagination. Thus, the significance of the political needs of the Flavian dynasty were crucial in changing wider awareness and perceptions of the region, and might serve to obscure the original motivations behind the

trouble and indeed the prior lack of interest in Judaea itself. That Vespasian had been declared emperor in the East (Jos., *BI* 4.616–617; Tac., *Hist*. 2.79; Suet., *Vesp*. 6.3) also added to the increased attention paid to the region more generally (as opposed to Judaea specifically): an emperor had now been made in the eastern portion of Rome's dominion.

Aside from this general increase in attention, the revolt had notable local consequences in terms of imperial administration. In short, the status of Judaea changed and for the first time there existed an independent Provincia Iudaea (see Eck 2017, 93–94 and 2007, 1–51; Cotton 1999; Mason 2016 concurs). This was not the case when it was originally taken under direct Roman rule in ad 6: there should no longer be any doubt that it was then an appendage to the province of Syria, as in fact Josephus tells us (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 17.355; see also *Ant. Iud.* 18.2; the only potential contradiction to this is Jos., *BI* 2.117, on which see Cotton 1999, 76). During this period, Judaea had an equestrian *praefectus* whose residence was at Caesarea. This did not, of course, preclude visits elsewhere, including to Jerusalem (Haensch 1997, 227–228, 234–237). But when Vespasian was given his command in ad 66 he could not operate with a legionary army in the *provincia* of another governor; consequently, Provincia Iudaea was born and Vespasian took the title *legatus Augusti pro praetore*. After the revolt, the area was ranked as a praetorian province and the governor was also commander of the legion stationed there, an extremely unusual arrangement at this time (Eck 2017, 94–95; 2007, 109–110).

This may seem like an administrative technicality—after all, even before the independent province was created, the area was still under direct rule—and yet its implications should not be underestimated. Prior to this, Judaea seems to have remained fairly autonomous in a variety of ways. Partly in the literal sense of the word: there is, for example, little evidence for the operation of the assizes beyond Josephus's reports of the travels of the prefects/procurators. This is certainly not conclusive evidence that they did not exist, but might be indicative at least of their (lack of) popularity. The use of Greek in legal documentation—one of the key markers of "Romanization" or at least of a desire to appear before a Roman court—is not in evidence until ad 115 (P. Murabbaat 114; see Cotton and Eck 2002 on the date). This strongly suggests that the inhabitants stuck to their local norms. A light hand should be assumed, perhaps deliberately in view of the (in Roman eyes) peculiar customs of their imperial subjects. No legions were stationed in Judaea in this era, and indeed the military presence was limited to auxiliaries in the form of five cohorts and one *ala* (Jos., *BI* 3.66; *Ant*. 20.176; for the debate on the composition of the auxiliaries see Speidel 1982/1983). The nearest legionary force at this point would have been in the territory of the Syrian province proper, not its Judaean appendage (see Speidel in this volume for more detail on the military in the Near East).

This is highly significant in understanding Judaea's place in the broader region: there is a limit to how much an area may "Romanize" if there is a lack of personnel. Thus, although Judaea had been under direct Roman rule for a long time, with an interlude of return to client kingship/rule by proxy in ad 41–44 at the height of Agrippa I's reign, there was a distinct limit to the effects of this until ad 66. While the area was an appendage of the province of Syria, its Roman imperial administrators seem to have treated it with a light touch and to an extent it remained a more isolated area within the broader region. Only after it became an independent province can Judaea be said to have been more integrated into the "Roman" Near East more fully.

Thus, after the revolt, Judaea's status and the nature of its relationship with the imperial center was transformed. This was now a province in and of its own right, and post-revolt, there was a praetorian governor in place and a legionary presence in this tiny part of the empire (the Legio X Fretensis). As such, there was a surge in military presence. Caesarea was built up and the governor had his base there, like the previous *praefecti*; the legion was, however, stationed at Jerusalem. The visibility of the imperial overlords increased dramatically and the impact of this on the landscape, culture, and even daily lives of Judaea's inhabitants should not be underestimated. The epigraphic evidence makes this readily apparent; from this point onward the number of statues, commemorations, and mentions of the army is larger and marks a shift from the character of the epigraphy pre-70, which are primarily ossuaries. The number of honorary statues in the provincial capital of Caesarea is also worth noting explicitly. Thus, visually too it seems that the increased Roman presence made its impression, and the very look of certain areas must have changed quite radically. Caesarea is of course a prime location for such practices, having a significant non-Jewish population, though we do know that at least before the revolt there were some Jews here too (see the synagogue at Jos., *BI* 2.289); and considering its importance as a harbor, we should assume a reasonable level of contact between Jews and non-Jews in this city. By AD 120, yet another legion—the Legio II Traiana—is attested in Judaea, meaning that the area had been upgraded to a consular province (Eck 2017, 96; Schäfer 1990, 283); this may even have happened by early in Trajan's reign (Eck 2007, 104–105, 113–114). The increased number of legionaries once again would mean yet another intensification of the Roman presence.

These changes in the administration of Judaea bring us firmly into the *interbellum* period. It is possible that during this era the greater, negative awareness of the province and its inhabitants was exacerbated by the events late in Trajan's reign: the so-called Diasporan revolt (ad 116–117; for the date, see originally Barnes 1989, who won considerable support; Horbury 1996; 2014, 166–179 still disagrees). This series of uprisings across Cyprus, Cyrenaica, Egypt, and Mesopotamia posed a significant threat; it has been suggested that this was accompanied by trouble in Judaea (Pucci Ben Zeev 2005, 256–257; Strobel 2010, 392; Horbury 2011, 196), either as part of the same uprising or shortly after. Dio/Xiphilinus and Eusebius, our best sources on the revolt, fail to mention this, and the spread to Judaea is primarily based on rabbinic testimony concerning the Qitos War: this was a reference to Lucius Quietus, who after successfully suppressing the revolt in Mesopotamia was given the governorship of Judaea (*m.Sotah* 9.14; *seder Olam* 30). In general, it seems unlikely that this set of uprisings did indeed involve Judaea (though see Horbury 2014, 257–264 for an updated, nuanced argument for this position) but this is not to deny that the rebellions would have had an effect on general perceptions of the Jewish people, and on their (perceived or actual) homeland. Yet another, bloody rebellion was not likely to commend this people to the Roman imperial power: Arrian (*Parthica* F79), indeed, attributed to Trajan the desire "to destroy the nation" (ἐξελεῖν τὸ ἔθνος) if it were possible, and Trajan's personal connections with the Flavian campaign through his father may also have affected the general tone of his rule (see Goodman 2003, 26).

Such imperial attitudes played a part in defining treatments of Jews at this time and, indeed, of Judaea. This should be combined with the now increasingly apparent tendency toward direct rule in this region: Nabataea, for example, was annexed in ad 106 for reasons that remain obscure. Other concerns also came to a head under Trajan: the Parthian

campaign in the later part of his reign brought the emperor in person to this corner of his empire and made the region a hotbed of military activity. The gains from the campaign were short-lived, with Hadrian giving up the territories his predecessor had conquered, but the campaign had the effect of shifting the focus from the imperial center farther to the east for a protracted period, to culminate in Hadrian's (the *legatus* of Syria) succession. As such, a further revolt in this area would be viewed as no minor matter.

Hadrian and Bar Kochba

The result of the events in the *interbellum* was that Hadrian was working in a rather different context from that of the Flavians by the time of the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 132. The motivations for this uprising are somewhat obscure: we have no Josephus to give us a—certainly one-sided, but still vital—account of the history of the revolt, and indeed the literary sources for this have yielded few clear answers. There are three primary contenders as immediate causes of the revolt, offered by the *Historia Augusta*, Dio, and a midrashic narrative of the fifth century (*Bereshith Rabbah* 64.10). To take the last first: this concerns the idea that permission to rebuild the Temple was approved and then withdrawn by the Romans. This finds possible support in a reference in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (16.4) to the Temple being rebuilt by the "servants of the enemy." The dating of the latter is, however, disputed; no emperors are mentioned in either text, thus also making the time to which the texts refer difficult to date. Coupled with the late compilation of the midrash, there seems little basis to place much emphasis on this in historical reconstructions.

Dio cites Hadrian's decision to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman colony, Aelia Capitolina, as the principal event that sparked rebellion (Cass. Dio 69.12.1). This was, in Dio's account, coupled with the erection of a temple to Jupiter: this understandably prompted outrage from the inhabitants of the region. Indeed, this has won greatest support as a plausible reason for the rebellion now that we have firmer evidence for the date of the decision to found the colony: coin hoards that include representations of Aelia Capitolina alongside those of Bar Kochba have made it clear that the foundation did precede the revolt (though see Tsafrir 2003 for a judicious review of the problems of evidence), abolishing the idea it was construed as a punishment and confirming Dio's chronology over that in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6). The consensus is now that it was founded in ad 130, during Hadrian's visit, though it has recently been suggested that the decision may have been taken much earlier (ben Zeev 2018). Even taking the consensus, the foundation in and of itself should not be viewed as the defining cause of the revolt: there is at least a two-year delay in the outbreak of violence. We would have to instead find a catalyst, as the decision does not seem to have provoked immediate dissent: increased Roman activity in the following years might have exacerbated tensions and tipped the population over the edge.

More problematic is the question of the ban on circumcision, or at least the ban on "mutilating their genitals" ("mutilare genitalia") as the technical term is not used in the *Historia Augusta* (SHA, *Hadr.* 14.2). This testimony has occasionally been accepted (Rabello 1995; Smallwood 1961) as evidence that a ban on circumcision preceded the revolt and was thus its principal cause. This source is notoriously problematic, and the context seems to suggest it is simply a snide comment: aside from a possible reference in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 9.4 (on which see Smallwood 1959, 336–337) there is no corresponding testimony placing this prohibition before the revolt. Indeed it would seem a needlessly inflammatory action that the Romans—well aware of Jewish circumcision practices—could have expected to

reap violent pushback. If we do indeed see Hadrian as pushing to punish the Jewish population once and for all (Goodman 2003), then this might fit, but it would be a rather senseless upheaval: the refoundation of Jerusalem could suffice. Thus, the ban has instead been viewed as a punishment for the uprising.

And yet evidence for it is scant. Hadrian certainly tightened laws on castration (D. 48.8.4.2), and we know from juristic sources that Antoninus Pius specifically exempted Jews from a ban on circumcision (D.48.8.11 *pr.*). There is also papyrological testimony of a number of specific permissions granted to priestly candidates in Egypt to be circumcised, and thus presumably exempted from the ban (P. Tebt. 2.291–293; 2.314; P. Stras. 1.60; BGU 1.82, 347, 13.2216, 15.2470; P.Iand. inv. 250 u.615; P. Oxy. 3567). The fact the earliest securely dated enquiry is from ad 156 (BGU 13.2216; P. Stras. 1.60 may be earlier but the date is uncertain) means that no enquiries or requests for exceptions are recorded during Hadrian's reign, and indeed the issue of what to do about Egyptian priests who needed to be circumcised only comes up well into Pius's era (ad 149 at the earliest if we take an early date for P. Stras. 1.60). Arguments from silence are dangerous, but this particular silence is odd: the position of Egyptian priests would have been problematic from the start if there were an empire-wide ban. This therefore might suggest that Hadrian did not in fact impose any such general ban, and when it later occurred, Jews were excepted from it. There may have been a local ban on circumcision during the Bar Kochba revolt (see Weikert 2016, 294–302; 330 for these arguments and an excellent, detailed examination of the sources), which would mean that this measure's impact was restricted to the local population and had no impact on the broader Jewish population across the empire. This would then limit the true extent of the consequences on the imperial stage. While there was a severe immediate local impact, and the revolt certainly led to more hostile perceptions of Jews, we have potentially come a long way from the previously assumed outright ban on the practice throughout the empire.

The revolt itself was certainly great in its extent and was perceived as such by the Romans themselves as Eck 1999 has amply demonstrated. This was no small, provincial uprising: several generals were involved, Iulius Severus was transferred from Britain to Judaea, and marines were drafted into the Legio X Fretensis (see Eck 1999, 78–82). To some extent this fits with what we might expect from the evidence from the rebels: the coinage, dated by the year "of the freedom of Israel" or "for the redemption of Jerusalem," makes abundantly clear that this was viewed by the rebels as the establishment of an independent state; the papyri from the Cave of Letters (P. Yadin 49–63) have also shed light on the way this realm was administered. This seems to have been very clearly a bid for independence from the start and was viewed as such.

While the revolt intensified the level of Roman interest in the region, as is to be expected, the seeds of many of the changes had begun earlier in Hadrian's reign. The most significant transformation of Judaea was of course the creation of Colonia Aelia Capitolina, but there was a great deal of activity before. Road building intensified from ad 120 (Isaac 1978, 49; Isaac and Roll 1979; see also the replies by Rea 1980; Isaac and Roll 1982), probably to aid military communication; recent excavations also suggest that paving works were begun in Jerusalem at the beginning of Hadrian's reign (Weksler-Bdolah 2014; Weksler-Bdolah et al. 2012; see also discussion in Pucci ben Zeev 2018, 96), perhaps implying that preparations for the creation of the colony started much earlier. It has also been suggested that Hadrian had also transferred the local government in certain cities—Sepphoris, Tiberias, and Neapolis—to the non-Jewish population (Jones 1971, 278; Isaac 198, 45). This is based on numismatic evidence from these cities, which start to depict distinctly pagan symbols, including pagan deities. While the change is notable it does not prove the change in administration, and

Schäfer's (1990, 287) argument that this indicates the effects of Hadrian's efforts to promote "Hellenization" is more plausible (see also Weikert 2016, 247–251 for a prolonged dissection of Jones's arguments). This should still be factored into our understanding of the changes wrought in this region in the *interbellum* period: this could be evidence of Jews explicitly attempting to appear more friendly to imperial culture in an increasingly hostile atmosphere.

The foundation of Aelia Capitolina intensified any effects greatly and marked a profound change to the composition of the region. There were, of course, other Roman colonies throughout the region (see Aliquot, chapter 15, this volume), though their foundation in Judaea was a little more limited. This was, of course, not the first colony in Judaea itself: Caesarea was already a colony at this point, though this seems to have been more a matter of status, perhaps with a small-scale settlement of veterans (Haensch 1997, 233 n. 17; Eck 2007, 192, 216–225; *contra* Isaac 1980, 39–43 on the veteran issue) as a reward for action during the First Revolt. It seems likely that Aelia's composition was of veterans from the Legio X Fretensis (Isaac 1980, 46–47; see Belayche 2001, 129 for more detail on the initial composition of the city). Where exactly the city was and its extent is still debated, though Magness (2000, 328–329) suggests that the "Third Wall," which lies approximately four hundred meters north of the modern boundaries of the Old City, was the northern wall of the Aelia Capitolina; this would resolve some of the problems of an otherwise compressed shape (see also the different solutions put forward by Eliav 2005, 109, 116–124; Belayche 2001, 132–133). Part of the controversy also hinges on the uncertain location of the legionary camp post-70, for which the archaeological remains—or rather lack of them—do not corroborate Josephus's statement (*BI* 6.413; 7.1–2, 5) that this was to the north of Herod's palace (for various suggestions for its location, see Bar 1998; Mazar 1999; Tsafrir 1999; Stiebel 1999, 68–103; Geva 2003, 414). The legionary bakery and bathhouse in the area to the southwest of the Temple Mount have also been instrumental in guiding suggestions (see Mazar 2000; Perez 2000 on the bathhouse). Nevertheless, the uncertainty surrounding the legionary camp and the extent of Aelia Capitolina place certain limits on our understanding of the changes on the local landscape.

There were further local repercussions. The name of the province was also changed to Syria-Palaestina, probably by Hadrian after the Bar Kochba revolt, though there is no conclusive testimony to this: while this has been viewed as being a particularly sore point for Jews, it is unclear to what exact degree the name change would have offended (Jacobsen 2001, 44–45). But certain points are abundantly clear. Jews were excluded from Jerusalem (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 4.6; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 16) and more generally the Jewish center moved to Galilee post-Bar Kochba, since the revolt's aftermath involved both a decimation of the population of traditionally Jewish areas and likely large numbers being enslaved. At the same time, the increased army presence—up to approximately 24,000 soldiers (Haensch 2010, 75)—radically affected the region's composition, as well as the influence of gentile practices. The arrangements set up toward the end of the first century and culminating in the rebels' suppression in ad 136 ultimately set the pattern of administration until late in the third century, radically changing a once quite untouched subsection of Syria into a province that was fully incorporated into the Roman administrative regime.

Conclusion

In some ways, Roman emperors' interest in this region was an accident of timing. Had Vespasian's commission to Judaea not coincided with the civil wars, this may have been a

small, local conflict that was quietly put down and gained little to no traction in wider imperial policy, ideology, or the empire's imagination. But the outbreak of conflict at the heart of imperial politics meant that Judaea suddenly offered an opportunity to the new emperor, one that had to be seized. This changed the reaction to it, and the climate in which future *principes* operated with regard to the region. Indeed, both Trajan's and Hadrian's policies should be viewed firmly in this light and a contrast drawn between the contexts in which the earlier and later emperors were operating. While we should thus certainly exercise caution in imposing later views on the outbreak, causes, and courses of the revolts, their consequences should not be underestimated.

While Judaea has been the focus of this chapter, in some ways the changes it underwent can be seen as typical of the restructuring that was occurring in the region. The broader turn toward annexation (or in Judaea's case toward closer imperial control) rather than rule through dependent kingdoms becomes ever more apparent at this time, and the increased military presence associated with this also changed the general composition of the population and their level of contact with the Roman imperial project. Thus, to an extent the changes in Judaea fit well within a wider framework of the structuring of the Roman Near East. During this period, this section of a province previously administered with a light touch came more conclusively under the thumb of the Roman Empire.

On the other hand, the revolts themselves call for specific consideration of whether Judaea and by association the Jewish people were treated differently in the Roman imperial mindset and thus demand a somewhat separate examination. Even within the broader landscape, the changes to this particular province should be drawn out. It is certain that as a result of the revolts, a tiny territorial area suddenly came to attention on an imperial level. But the perhaps more unusual point is that these local events had severe repercussions for Jews living elsewhere in the form of an increased amount of imperial attention. This attention was not friendly: there was an increasing level of hostility in elite Roman constructions of Jews as a foreign enemy from this point onward. A corresponding shift in attitudes from Jews toward the imperial power also might explain in part the subsequent revolts, the last of which (Bar Kochba) at least was explicitly anti-Roman in aim.

Consequently, while ad 66–136 certainly saw a complete restructuring of the administration of the province and an ingress of larger numbers of Roman representatives into Judaea as a result, what separates this slightly from the treatment of the rest of the region is that events and their handling at a local level also had significant repercussions for a particular marginal group throughout the empire. Indeed, the best known and most often discussed consequences for the revolts are those on a rather broader scale: on Jewish identity and the national cult. The destruction of the Temple, the imposition of the Jewish tax, and the later refoundation of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina had profound effects on the creation of Judaism as a religion, and on the very nature of Jewish cultic practice. The religious center eventually moved to Yavneh (Iamnia) as a result of the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem, and rabbinic Judaism of course had its center there. There was thus a tangible shift in cultural and religious terms as well as on the local and administrative level.

Overall, the effects of the Jewish Wars should be limited to those on Judaea specifically and the Jewish population elsewhere in the empire. But the transformation of this province may also be viewed within the wider pattern of restructuring the region, and the wars may be numbered among the growing collection of other concerns that made the Roman emperors themselves shift their focus eastward.

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CHAPTER 19

DIVUS TRAIANUS PARTHICUS AND THE NEAR EAST

KARL STROBEL

Following the end of the civil war and the Jewish revolt, Vespasian, together with his son Titus who later succeeded him as emperor, started a reorganization of the territories of the empire in Asia Minor and the Near East. This was influenced by events during Nero's Parthian war, including the various changes of the structures of provincial administration and command (Eck 2007; 2012; Adak and Wilson 2012; Marek 2010, 422–426; Strobel 2019 passim). The new double province of Lycia and Pamphylia was established in AD 70, incorporating the southern areas of the former major province of Galatia. Before leaving Syria for Rome at the end of 70, Titus transferred the Legio XII Fulminata from Syria to the province of Cappadocia, where it was stationed in Melitene on the Euphrates (Jos., *BI* 7.1.2.18). Cappadocia was granted the status of a senatorial praetorian province; as commander of the legion, the first governor was responsible for the occupation of Lesser Armenia, but his identity is not known. Lesser Armenia was annexed in 71 and incorporated into Cappadocia, advancing Roman provincial territories to the borders of the buffer state of Armenia. The Caucasian kingdom of Iberia remained a Roman vassal state. In 75 the fortifications of the citadel of Armaz-Tsikhe (Harmozica) of the Iberian capital Mtskheta were augmented by engineering units of the Roman army (*ILS* 8795 = *SEG* XX, 112; Gebhardt 2002, 44–48). Relations with Rome were further strengthened, and particularly fostered during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian (cf. *SEG* XVI, 781, 782; *SEG* XLIII, 1015; *PIR*² P 342; Linderski 2007 [King Flavius Dades]; Braund 1993; 1994; 2015, 143–145; Schleicher 2021, esp. 63–80; Furtwängler et al. 2009). The tomb of Queen Ulpia Naxia is characteristic of the period (Braund et al. 2010; Braund 2015, 144–145). The Iberian prince Amazaspos, grandson of Pharasmanes I and brother of the ruling King Mithridates II, fell at the head of the Iberian contingent in the fighting at Nisibis in AD 116, and was later given a state funeral in Rome (*IGR* I, 192).

The Transcaucasian kingdom of Albania also remained tied to Rome. The assuredly diplomatic mission to the kingdom of a centurion of the Legio XII Fulminata can be seen in the context of the tensions during the year 93, and most probably involved a reconnaissance of the situation relating to the passage between the Caspian Sea and the eastern foothills of the Caucasus Mountains (inscription on a block of stone on the slopes of the Boyuk-Dash mountain, about 70 km southwest of Baku; *AE* 1951, 263; see Heidenreich 1983; Braund 2003, 189–190; Smyshlyayev 2018; on Albania, Bais 2001). Domitian's interest in the Transcaucasian region is alluded to by both Valerius Flaccus and Statius (Grosso 1955, esp. 36–55).

With the advances of the mounted Alans into Armenia and the Parthian territories, against which the Parthian king of kings appealed unsuccessfully to Rome for help in ad 75 (Suet., *Dom*. 2.2; Cass. Dio 66.15.3), the Legio XVI Flavia Firma, organized in 70 and stationed in Syria until 75 (*AE* 1983, 927; Omar 2017), was transferred to the strategically important town of Satala in Lesser Armenia. The large provincial complex of Galatia in central Anatolia had already been organized as a consular double province together with Cappadocia during the political and military crisis of 73–74. Its first governor of consular rank was probably since ad

73/74 Gnaeus Pompeius Collega, who is securely attested at the start of 76 (*PIR*² P 600). The Roman vassal state of Commagene was occupied in 72, becoming part of the province of Syria, making the Euphrates the immediate border with the Parthian sphere of power. The Syrian Legio III Gallica was stationed in Samosata, the former capital of Commagene, and the Legio IIII Scythica was moved to Zeugma. This meant that in ad 75 four legions had been advanced to the banks of the Euphrates, effectively the border with Armenia and Parthia. The Cilician territories bordering Syria were reorganized, the principality of Olba was abolished, and west and east Cilicia were incorporated into the new province of Cilicia; east Cilicia had up to this point been co-administered by Syria.

The client state of the kings of Emesa was integrated into the province of Syria in ad 75/78 (Sartre 2005, 76–77 for ad 78; cf. Levick 2007, 13–14 with note 48). The Arab-Syrian ruling family retained royal status and remained in charge of the worship of the sun deity Sol Elagabalus; they later attained the imperial throne through Julia Domna and her family (cf. Sullivan 1990, 198–202; Konrad 2014).

The oasis city of Palmyra (Strobel 2019, 270; Hartmann 2001, 47–58; Sommer 2005, 139–224; generally Yon 2012; Hammad 2010; Meyer, Seland, Anfinset 2016; Sommer 2020; Yon 2022; general overview Raja 2022) had been under the authority of the governor of Syria since the reign of Tiberius, without affecting the autonomous status of the Palmyrene tribes and their ruling elite. In ad 75, Palmyra was connected to the Syrian road network by the strategically important road to Soura on the Euphrates (*AE* 1933, 205; Konrad 1996, 163–180). Emesa and Palmyra both had their own effective fighting forces for the protection of caravan routes and the control of wider areas in the northwest of the Arabian Peninsula; these were recruited from related Arab and Aramaic tribes of the Syrian semi-desert and desert (Geyer 2001). Both cities had an intermediate status, both as cities of the Roman province of Syria and as regional powers on the Arabian Peninsula, between the right bank of the Euphrates and the Nabataean kingdom. Palmyra possessed both the agriculturally worked hinterland to the northwest of the city, and the region under its control extending as far as Hit in the middle of the Euphrates valley. The Palmyrenes also had a settlement in Messene on the Persian Gulf as a jumping-off point for their trade with India and another trading base in Vologesia, at the center of the Parthian kingdom. Military and civil inscriptions provide evidence of Palmyrene bases in Birtha, Dura-Europos, and Anatha on the Euphrates in the Parthian sphere of power, as well as in the hinterland along the right bank of the Euphrates, in Gamlâ, Gennae, Wadi Ḫauran, Umm as-Swab, and Umm as-Salabikh. Palmyra's role as buffer state and trading power was in the interests of both great powers, Rome and Parthia (Teigen and Seland 2017; Sommer 2020). There had been a Palmyrene presence in Egypt, in southern Arabia, in the ports on the Red Sea, and on the island of Dioskouridou nēsos/Socotra since the middle of the first century ad. Palmyrenes were active in trade on the Red Sea and eastward to India, especially from the time of Trajan and the end of the Nabataean kingdom (Cobb 2020; also, Sidebotham 2011; Strauch 2012; Seland 2016). Trajan strengthened the connection with Palmyra and, alongside irregulars who fought in the Dacian Wars and against the Parthians, he recruited regular troops from the tribal bands, including the Ala I Ulpia dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria, which was stationed in the province of Arabia under Hadrian, and later the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum milliaria equitata sagittaria, stationed in Dura Europos. Palmyrene archers were transferred by Hadrian in 118/119 from Syria to Dacia, where they were stationed (Palmyreni sagittarii ex Syria *CIL* XVI, 68; *RMD* 17). Palmyrene merchants and caravan guides were doubtless a vital source of information on events and power relations in the Parthian sphere of influence.

Until the reign of Trajan, relations with Parthia maintained the compromise solution reached at the end of the Parthian war under Nero; an Arsacid prince sat on the throne of Armenia, but required confirmation of his rule from Rome and was therefore formally a client-king of Rome. However, an affair in which the sons of the last king of Commagene sought refuge with the Parthian King of Kings Vologases I led to the humiliation of the king, and was followed in AD 73 by a dangerous escalation of tensions between the great powers (Strobel 2019, 76–78). The crisis was exacerbated by the deaths of two governors of Syria in quick succession in 73, probably from plague, and the elder Trajan took over the province of Syria, which he governed until 78. The conflict on the Euphrates border culminated in a limited military confrontation in 73/74, for which detailed sources are lacking. It was brought to a successful conclusion by the elder Trajan who was awarded the *ornamenta triumphalia*; Vespasian and Titus accepted an imperial acclamation. The younger Trajan was the senatorial military tribune of a Syrian legion at this time, and took part in his father's operations, gaining firsthand knowledge of the region.

Despite Trajan the elder's demonstration of Rome's military might and his stabilization of the region, in 89/90 continuing tensions along the Euphrates border almost led to war under Domitian. This was provoked by the affair of a pseudo-Nero and his support by the Parthian King of Kings Pacorus II (Tac., *Hist*. 1.2; Suet., *Nero* 57.2; Strobel 2019, 154–155). It appears that Domitian then planned a demonstration of military power for the year 93, and in order to finance the concentration of troops required, cities in Syria and Cilicia massively increased the output of their mints. A propaganda campaign prepared the ground for war and the successful general Cornelius Nigrinus was made governor of Syria. But in 94 the output of the cities' mints returned to more normal levels, and it is probable that Pacorus, who was already under pressure from a dynastic conflict with his brother Osroes, had sought a diplomatic solution. After this, the eastern border of the empire remained stable until Trajan's war of aggression.

Arabia Adquisita

After the disappointment of the compromise peace that ended the First Dacian War of AD 101–102 (Strobel 2019, 308–313), Trajan undoubtedly wanted some other way to fulfill the expectations aroused by his own ideology and propaganda of a successful policy of expansion implemented by a military commander on the imperial throne. On the eastern borders of the empire the only suitable objective was the vassal state of the Nabataean kingdom (summarized in Strobel 2019, 34, 325–331, 343). At the death of the Nabataean king Malichus II (AD 40–70), his successor Rabbel II was still a child, and his mother Shuqailat II ruled the kingdom as regent (Graf 2022, 278). In 76 Rabbel had married his two sisters, with Gāmilat taking on the central role as queen. After her death, Rabbel's other sister and spouse Hagiru II appears from 93 as queen on the coinage (Barkay 2014; 2019). Gamilat's son Obodas is documented in 98/99 as the (probably eldest) son and sole heir to the throne, but Hagiru's son Maliku/Malichus was already presented together with Obodas even before the death of Gamilat. Rabbel II died in early 105, possibly murdered, and Malichus III appears in the first year of his reign in the month of Nisan, but Trajan refused to recognize him as king. There was doubtless a conflict over the succession between the sons of Rabbel's two sister-spouses, with Trajan withholding his recognition from both. In fact, with the death of Rabbel, Trajan had decided to annex the Nabataean kingdom to the empire. The rich Hellenistic cities in the north of the kingdom, the caravan routes from Petra to southern Arabia, and the port of Aila (Aqaba) were also promising economic objectives. The outbreak of the Second Dacian War in

105, which started unforeseen by Rome with a preventive offensive by Decebalus, did not change these plans. Troops were assembled from Syria, Egypt, and Judaea for the occupation of the country (Strobel 1988; Gebhardt 2002, 87–93). Overall command was given to the Syrian governor Aulus Cornelius Palma Frontonianus, and Roman armies invaded in the winter of 105/106, advancing on Bostra in the north and Petra in the south. The expeditionary force from the province of Judaea occupied Nabataean territories in the Negev. The Nabataean royal troops were incorporated into the Roman army as the Cohortes I-VI Ulpiae Petraeorum sagittariorum eqitatae. Arabia's conversion to the status of a Roman province was proclaimed on 23 March 106 (start of the provincial era; *RPC* III, 528). The annexed Nabataean kingdom was reorganized as the senatorial province of Arabia, with a praetorian governor and garrisoned by the Legio III Cyrenaica. The province of Syria lost the cities of Philadelphia, Gerasa, Adraa, and Dium to the new province (Gebhardt 2002, 88–89). Petra was the capital and civil administrative center of the governor. After the completion of the legionary camp in Bostra, this became the military headquarters of the praetorian legate, who also commanded the legion. Milestones on the Via Nova Traiana tell us that it was completed between AD 111 and 114 (Graf 1995). A paved highway stretching for more than 430 km, from Aqaba on the Gulf of Eilat to the borders of the province of Syria, and traversing some harsh desert terrain, it provided the region with a new, primarily military, route from which the territories of the northwest of the Arabian Peninsula, inhabited mostly by Bedouin tribes, could be controlled. The area of direct Roman control extended through the Wadi Sirhan to the Nefud Desert and across the Hejaz, as far as near the important caravan city of Yatrib/Medina (Franke et al. 2011). The province included the Hejaz region with the Civitas Hegraeorum on the incense road to southern Arabia, as well as the trading oasis towns of Tayma and Dedan, the fortified oasis settlement of Qurayyah in Tabuk, and the region of Dumata. Hegra (Mada'in Salih), which had been one of the most important civil and military centers of the Nabataean kingdom, was now controlled by the Roman army (cf. Fiema et al. 2020). The Nabataean Red Sea ports in the south, Egra Kome (probably Ras Kurkumaal-Quaseir, south of al-Wajh), and Leuke Kome (very probably Yanbu), were now in Roman hands, too. A naval and military base was built on the island of Farasan, off the port of Jizan; the base was later under the control of the Egyptian military administration (Strobel 2019, 330–331; Villeneuve 2007). A permanent Red Sea naval fleet was established to protect the sea trading routes to India and east Africa from piracy, as far as the Gulf of Aden. Another Red Sea route followed the coasts of Eritrea and Somalia south to the Rufiji River delta, south of Zanzibar in Tanzania, and very probably the site of the ancient trading settlement of Rhapta. To facilitate the trade in goods, Trajan ordered the restoration, from 111/112 on, of the silted-up canal connecting the eastern arm of the Nile, via the Wadi Tumilat, to Clysma (Suez) (Traianos potamos; Ptol., *Geog*. 4.5.54; Sheehan 2015, 35–53); this became a further outlet for the trade to India, alongside the Egyptian Red Sea ports that had been developed in Ptolemaic times.

Trajan's Parthian War

Trajan's systematic cultivation of his own public image following the Second Dacian War culminated in his self-glorification and self-apotheosis as emperor, and found its monumental expression in Trajan's Forum and Trajan's Column in Rome (Strobel 2019, 366–417). [1] With the erection of the column in AD 112–113, the charismatic and sacral exaltation of both the person and the autocracy of Trajan reached its peak. He was now the invincible and godlike ruler, claiming the destiny, conferred by Jupiter Optimus Maximus, of ruler of the known world.

The consecration of the Forum Traiani and the Basilica Ulpia on 1 January 112 and of Trajan's Column on 12 May 113 marked the high point of this monumental staging of his own myth, a cult of personality that was not confined to Rome and which was omnipresent in the coinage. The military element and the importance of victory for the imperial throne were given open expression and reached a level never to be surpassed in later years. With the consecration of his column, Trajan was seen by all as elevated to the status of an invincible hero of more than human nature, in a monumental staging of himself as triumphant *imperator*. It seems probable that Trajan himself internalized the idea of his invincibility and of his heroic status, to an extent that can be described as delusional. The final stage of his approach to the level of the gods was marked by the resolution of the senate to attribute to Trajan the name of Optimus in 114, even before the first bigger successes in the east. Following the model of Augustus, he received this addition to his name, implying the claim to be comparable to the highest of the gods, Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Strobel 2019, 396–397).

From the second half of ad 112, the coinage of the Roman and Alexandrian imperial mints and their program of propaganda prepared the ground for an imminent war in the east. The division of the great provincial complex of Cappadocia-Galatia in 112 was a substantial change to the administrative structure of Asia Minor. Gaius Julius Quadratus Bassus was the last governor of the whole undivided double province from 107/108 to 111/112, consisting of the regions of Galatia, Paphlagonia, Isauria, Pisidia, Pontus Galaticus, Pontus Polemoniacus, Cappadocia, and Lesser Armenia. Following the division, Marcus Junius Homullus took over the new province,[2] made up of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, with Pontus Galaticus and Polemoniacus, and including the legionary camps Melitene (XII Fulminata) and Satala (XVI Flavia Firma) and strengthened auxiliary forces.

The necessary logistic and administrative preparations for the departure of the emperor for the east, and the first troop movements, probably also in Syria, must already have been under way in first half of ad 113. Trajan's decision to launch an unprovoked war of aggression and conquest against the Parthian Empire and its vassal states, and against Armenia, was undoubtedly driven by his personal pursuit of fame and conquest (on the reasons for war and Trajan's desire for military glory, Strobel 2019, 418–432). This was also the view of Cassius Dio (68.17.1; see also Fronto, *Princ. hist*. 15), who took the occasion for a devastating critique of Trajan's megalomania and his failure (68.29.2–4), "although he was unable to preserve even the territory that he had subdued. For his achievements he obtained among other honors the privilege of celebrating a triumph for as many nations as he pleased; for by reason of the large number of the peoples of whom he was constantly writing to them (i.e. the senate) they were unable in some cases to follow him intelligently or even to use the names correctly…. But he was destined never to reach Rome again nor to accomplish anything comparable to his previous exploits, and to lose even those earlier acquisitions" (trans. E. Cary). Tacitus clearly expressed his criticisms of Trajan's war of aggression in the *Annals*, in his account of Nero's Parthian war and of the policies of Corbulo, a realpolitik and diplomacy from a position of military strength. He condemns both the refusal of a diplomatic solution and the murder of the Armenian king (cf. Velvaet 1999). Tacitus cautions against premature triumphalism and warns of the repeated setbacks that were to follow.

Given the internal and dynastic weaknesses of the Parthian Empire, it seemed the ideal moment for a large-scale war of conquest in the east, and in ad 113 Armenia supplied a welcome pretext for hostilities. Following the death of the Armenian king Sanatruces, possible a nephew of Vologases I, the Parthian King of Kings Pacorus II had installed his own son Axidares (Exedares) as king in Armenia, before ad 104/105. Trajan had confirmed his status as king, in accordance with the existing arrangement with the Parthian Empire. Pacorus himself

had been named, in ad 77/78, as co-regent by his father Vologases I, and had succeeded him after his death. Pacorus's struggle with the usurpation of Artabanus (III/IV) lasted from ad 80/81 to the end of the 80s, but from 89/90 onward he had also been in conflict with his brother Osroes, who was pressing his own claim to the throne of the king of kings and whose power base lay in the eastern part of the empire. Even before the death of Pacorus in 108/109, Trajan took advantage of the situation to stage provocative actions, in breach of existing agreements, and to intervene with intent in Armenia against the interests and authority of Axidares, which led to bitter complaints by the king of kings (Arr., *Parth*. frg. 32 ed. Roos). After the death of Pacorus, Osroes's obvious claim to the succession as the new king of kings was disputed, because Vologases II had already been co-regent with his father Pacorus since 104/105 and since 111/112 had minted coins depicting himself as king of kings. These internal conflicts had greatly weakened the Parthian Empire, but in the face of Trajan's aggression the parties to the dispute came to an agreement, under which the claim of Vologases II to the eastern part of the empire and to the succession to the throne after Osroes were confirmed. Following the death of Osroes in 128/129, Vologases became the sole and undisputed ruler. Osroes's son Parthamaspates lost his claim to the succession in this agreement and therefore later offered his services to Trajan as a pretender to the throne.

In 113 Osroes deposed Axidares as king in Armenia and installed his nephew Parthamasiris (*PIR*² P 131) on the throne. Parthamasiris wrote to Trajan requesting his confirmation as king, but Trajan declined to recognize Parthia's Armenian reshuffle. Axidares meanwhile appealed to Trajan for his reinstatement on the throne, but Trajan had no interest in this. Roman preparations had doubtless not gone unnoticed by the Parthians, and there is good reason to see the deposition of Axidares, who was clearly mistrusted by Osroes, as a preventive measure on the part of the king of kings.

Trajan embarked for the east probably in July 113. He arrived in Syria by sea via Athens and Ephesus before the end of October. For three and a half years, Antioch became the residence of the emperor and his family and the administrative center of the empire. Osroes had already responded to the preparations for Trajan's departure by sending emissaries to meet with Trajan at Athens (Cass. Dio 68.17.2). These informed Trajan that the king of kings requested the emperor not to start a war and to confirm Parthamasiris as king in Armenia by sending him the diadem. They said that Axidares had been deposed because his rule had been in the interests of neither Rome nor Parthia. It is clear that Osroes wished to avert a conflict, even if it meant accepting a diplomatic humiliation. Trajan gave no clear answer but declared that he regarded the action of the king of kings as a hostile act that had ended mutual treaty, and that on his arrival in Syria he would take all measures he deemed necessary. Trajan had no interest in a diplomatic solution (cf. Fronto, *Princ. hist*. 16; with an attempt to exonerate Trajan, Arr., *Parth*. frg. 32–33 ed. Roos).

Emissaries of Abgar, king of Osrhoene, came to Antioch to assure Trajan of the king's friendly intentions; Abgar was already at pains to take up as neutral a position as possible in the coming conflict. Trajan began the campaign in the spring of 114, marching to Melitene, where satraps and vassals of the Armenian king came over to his side at the beginning of May. He then crossed the Euphrates and occupied Arsamosata without resistance, later advancing to Satala, where mutual amity with the king of the Heniochi and Machelones (in the region of today's Abkhazia and Georgia) and the latter's recognition of Roman supremacy were affirmed. From Satala, Trajan marched to Elegeia. Through letters, Parthamasiris had tried in vain to arrive at an agreement with Trajan, and to achieve his recognition as Armenian king. He now came in person to the Roman camp at Elegeia, seeking an audience with Trajan, who refused to acknowledge him as king, declaring Armenia a Roman province. Parthamasiris was

taken prisoner and subsequently killed. This action was a clear breach of the ancient law of nations and was roundly condemned even by Roman opinion; it could not be expressed, however, until after the death of Hadrian (see Fronto, *Princ. hist*. 16). Through his action, Trajan demonstrated his rejection of any diplomatic solution and his determination to seek a decisive military confrontation with the Parthian adversary.

Trajan's actions in Armenia could only lead to war between the great powers, and in accordance with his aims he went on in the same year of 114 to begin his war of aggression on the Parthian Empire, invading the Parthian vassal state of Media Adiabene (see Luther 2015). In Elegeia, the kings of Iberia and Albania were recognized by Trajan and their relations with Rome were strengthened. An Iberian military contingent, under the prince Amazaspos, became part of the Roman forces. Treaty relations with the tribes and minor kingdoms in the region of Colchis were also renewed and deepened. Roman troops then occupied the Armenian capital Artaxata and advanced as far as the Caspian Sea. Trajan installed Catilius Severus as governor of Cappadocia and of Greater and Lesser Armenia. From Artaxata, Trajan marched to Tigranocerta, Armenia's second capital, and on into Adiabene, where he took the strategically important city of Nisibis. There was fierce fighting with the forces of the king of Adiabene, Meharaspes, who was supported by troops of Ma'nu, ruler of Hatra. In Edessa, Abgar succeeded in being accepted as an ally of Rome, and his rule was confirmed. Having taken the city of Batnae, Trajan returned to winter quarters in Antioch; here he almost lost his life in the major earthquake of 5 January 115, which devastated large parts of the province of Syria.

In the spring of 115, a Roman army column marching along the Euphrates was victorious in a battle near the city of Dura-Europos. Trajan himself advanced to the Tigris via Nisibis. Ma'nu of Hatra and Manisarus, king of Media Atropatene and a supporter of Vologases II, sent emissaries to Trajan, seeking to come to an agreement. A third column under the command of Lusius Quietus was active in northwest Iraq. Trajan crossed the Tigris in the face of opposition from the army of Adiabene, occupied the region of Corduene, and took by force of arms Assur, Nineveh, and Arbela (Erbil), the capital of Adiabene. Ma'nu now appeared in person before Trajan and was confirmed as vassal ruler of Hatra. The occupation of the whole of northern Mesopotamia was completed by the middle of 115, and its organization as the Roman province of Mesopotamia began. The first governor and commander of the troops stationed there was Decimus Terentius Scaurianus. Roman rule began with the building of roads; the Roman tax system was introduced, with a special tax for the large Jewish population, and customs regulations and duties of service to Rome were imposed on the nominally independent vassal states.

The fighting continued in Adiabene, where Mehasarpes rejected an offer by Trajan, and against the Mardoi south of Lake Van. It was not until the end of 115 that Adiabene could be declared the new Roman province of Assyria. In the autumn of 115, Trajan marched at the head of a large army on Ctesiphon, intending to force the king of kings into a final decisive battle, but the rival Arsacid parties had by now agreed on a joint course of action. Vologases, the son of the deceased Armenian king Sanatruces, went on to reconquer Armenia and to rule there. Vologases II, who had been confirmed as co-ruler and future sole heir to the Parthian throne, went on to reconquer Adiabene through the military leadership of his general Arsaces, advancing from Media Atropatene and threatening the Roman lines in the rear. Osroes, for his part, did not commit himself to a decisive battle with Rome but vacated Ctesiphon. At the same time, emissaries stirred up anti-Roman sentiment in the cities. Trajan marched along the Euphrates to Babylon, advancing on Seleucia and Vologesia, both of which were taken without a fight. He crossed the Tigris on a pontoon bridge and took Ctesiphon unopposed. From the

palace he carried off the golden throne of the Arsacid high kings and took a daughter of Osroes prisoner. Given that the report of Trajan's conquest of Ctesiphon reached Rome on 20 or 21 February 116, this probably took place shortly after the middle of December. Occupied central Mesopotamia was added to the occupied area of Adiabene, enlarging the new province of Assyria southward; Appius Maximus Santra was appointed governor. From Ctesiphon, Trajan sailed south with his fleet down the Tigris to the Persian Gulf, in what seemed to be the triumphal culmination of his campaign. Attambelos, ruler of the kingdom of Characene or Mesene, acknowledged Roman supremacy. Trajan had a large victory monument erected on the Gulf coast, even though a military victory against the actual armies of the king of kings had not been won.

Even as Trajan was celebrating his apparent success in February and March, the situation was developing into what would be a catastrophe for the Roman forces. Their lines of supply and communication were overstretched and supplies had run low. In Edessa, Abgar was overthrown by the anti-Roman opposition before the end of the year. In the cities of Mesopotamia, the anti-Roman population rose up against those among the upper classes who had favored an accommodation with Rome. The undermanned Roman garrisons were driven out or slaughtered. The large Jewish communities of Mesopotamia also took part in the popular uprising and the toppling of Roman rule in the cities. The Parthian counteroffensive began simultaneously. In Armenia, Vologases, son of Sanatruces, attacked Catilius Severus and drove the Romans out of the eastern part of the country, offering at the same time to call a truce and to negotiate. Trajan agreed to a separate peace in which he withdrew from the larger eastern part of Armenia and from Artaxata, and recognized Vologases as king in Armenia. Hadrian would later, in September 117, withdraw from the remaining western parts of Armenia, including the cities of Arsamosata and Rhandeia, and the region around Erzerum, and recognize Vologases's rule. Arsaces, Vologases II's field commander, marched with a strong Parthian force into the newly proclaimed province of Assyria, where he annihilated Appius Maximus Santra and his troops. The territories beyond the Tigris and in the upper Tigris region were lost to Rome. Edessa, Nisibis, and Seleucia had fallen, and only the strong garrison of Ctesiphon was able to hold out. Seleucia was retaken after a siege, while Trajan himself remained for the time being in Babylon. Lucius Quietus, commanding a part of the imperial army, proceeded against the rebellious cities of the north with terror and ruthless repression. Edessa was retaken following a siege, looted, and burned to the ground. The kingdom of Osroene was declared no longer existent and annexed to the province of Mesopotamia, and Quietus retook Nisibis, also with brutal force. The last reserves of the provincial armies moved to the east. But the loss of Hatra, whose ruler Ma'nu did not survive the uprising, blocked the lines of communication along the Tigris and the route between northern Mesopotamia and Ctesiphon (on Hatra Sommer 2005, 355–390; Dirven 2013).

Parthamaspates, who saw that his claim to the throne was lost, had submitted to Trajan. To head off the oncoming disaster, Trajan decided to give up southern and central Mesopotamia and to set up a Parthian king in opposition to Osroes. He traveled to Ctesiphon and ceremoniously installed Parthamaspates as the Parthian king of kings, being authorized by Rome. The province of Assyria no longer existed. The remaining parts of western Armenia and the province of Mesopotamia were retained. The situation was exacerbated by the outbreak in 115 of the large-scale Jewish uprising in Cyrenaica, in Egypt, and on Cyprus, and was not stabilized there until August 117, at the cost of the removal of troops from the eastern theater of war. At the start of 117, it proved necessary to transfer troops under Lusius Quietus to Judaea, to nip an incipient Jewish uprising in the bud. In addition, the situation worsened on the lower Danube, where Roxolani and Iazyges began their attacks on the province of Dacia,

probably as early as the autumn of 116. The governor posted to the province, Julius Quadratus Bassus, was killed in the autumn of 117. In Britannia also, the withdrawal of troops led to a temporary destabilization of the northern frontier. The imperial army's reserves were exhausted and the provincial garrisons were thinly stretched.

To keep Parthamaspates in power in Ctesiphon and to restore his own authority, Trajan needed to retake the strategically key city of Hatra. In July/August 116 he began, in person and at a highly inauspicious time of year, to besiege the city, having failed to take it by storm. The Roman troops suffered increasingly, as did Trajan's health. In a crushing blow to his prestige, he was eventually forced to break off the fruitless siege. Troops were withdrawn to Dura-Europos, Singara, and Nisibis; the imperial army returned to winter quarters in Syria to regroup; and the physically and mentally weakened emperor, his aura of invincibility shattered, returned to Antioch. Despite the loss of an estimated one third of Roman troops, he planned a renewed offensive, probably with the aim of securing at least the province of Mesopotamia. During the preparations Trajan suffered a stroke and was partially paralyzed; his condition was complicated by edema. The emperor required constant care and was completely screened off from his surroundings by Plotina Augusta, Marciana Augusta, and the praetorian prefect Attianus. As governor of Syria, Hadrian was in command of the reformed field army and the provincial troops. With Trajan mortally ill, Hadrian conducted the business of government in his name, with the support of the women surrounding the emperor and of Hadrian's semi-paternal confidant Attianus. Opponents of Hadrian were expelled from Syria. In the spring of 117 Hadrian ordered a halt to all military operations. Negotiations were opened with the Parthian king of kings over a truce and withdrawal from Mesopotamia. The Parthians, for their part, refrained from taking advantage of the situation.

In July 117, accompanied by Plotina, Marciana, and Attianus, the dying Trajan took ship for Rome. Hadrian was officially invested with supreme command over the eastern part of the empire. The emperor died on 7 August 117, on the journey back to Rome in the Cilician port of Selinus, and Hadrian's official accession took place on 11 August. Trajan's triumph over the Parthians was celebrated posthumously in Rome in 118.

With the start of the official armistice, probably at the end of August or beginning of September 117, Rome withdrew from the remaining areas of Armenia, and the province of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia was reinstated. Parts of Pontus Polemoniacus, along with Pontus Galaticus, were combined into the new district of Pontus Mediterraneus which was incorporated into Cappadocia, including the cities of Cerasus, Trebizond, and Apsarus and the eparchy of Ora Ponti Polemoniaci (Marek 2010, 427, 431). Osrhoene was restored as a Roman buffer state under a local dynast, and all troops were withdrawn to Syria. With the withdrawal of the Roman garrison from Ctesiphon, Parthamaspates could no longer maintain his rule, and Hadrian installed him in Edessa, where he maintained his claim to the status of king of kings and ruled, at first alongside the local dynast, and then as sole ruler of Osrhoene (Strobel 2019, 450). He was driven out in 122, almost certainly with Parthian participation. The loss of this buffer state made the situation more difficult, and in the spring of 123 Hadrian traveled to Syria, where a display of military strength had been assembled. The meeting with the king of kings resulted in a definitive peace, in which Hadrian returned Osroes's daughter, although he only held out the prospect of the return of the golden throne (SHA, *Hadr*. 12.8 with 13.8; Strobel 2019, 493).

Hadrian's decision to forgo further territorial expansion was the result of bitter experience of the limits that applied even to the empire, whose power and internal resources had proved to be overtaxed. The failure of Trajan's unprovoked war of aggression on the Parthian Empire and its sphere of influence consolidated the formation of the blocs of the two competing

powers of Rome and Persia. This was changed neither by the Parthian wars of the Severan emperors nor by the offensives of Shapur I. For the next five hundred years, the history of the Near East would be determined by the military confrontations and periods of detente between the Roman Empire—and subsequently the early Byzantine Empire—and the Persian Empire of the Arsacid and Sassanian dynasties.

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1 For a detailed account see Strobel 2019, 418–472, 475–482, 485. On the states along the Euphrates frontier Sommer 2005; Edwell 2008; Marciak 2017.

2 In 113/117 the Pontic eparchies were no longer part of the province of Galatia. The first governor of Galatia was Lucius Cosonnius Gallus in 113–114/115. He was proconsul of Sardinia in 111 and suffect consul 16.8.117 (*AE* 2003, 1801 with *ILS* 1038; *RMD* 229; Eck 2013; Mastino and Zucca 2014). His successor in 115–116/117, Ignotus of *ILS* 1039, was previously charged with carrying out the census as part of the reorganization of the eparchy of Paphlagonia in 113. Rémy 1989, 85–87, 145–148 supposes Caesennius Sospes was the first governor following the division of the double province; for an opposing view, see Strobel 1989, 128–130. See also Muscalu 2011, though problematic and without the clear distinction between the person named in *ILS* 1017 and the suffect consul of 114.

CHAPTER 20

HADRIAN IN SYRIA AND THE EAST

MARY T. BOATWRIGHT

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed increased scholarship on lands and peoples east of the Mediterranean, often previously considered peripheral to Greek and Roman history because of language, alleged "Orientalism," or the like. Current scholarly investigation has been facilitated by the translation and interpretation of documents in this wide area's vernacular languages. The *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* (begun in 2010), for example, reveals how much Syriac, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and various dialects such as Palmyrene Aramaic, add to knowledge based on Greek and Latin authors and inscriptions: we need both Palmyrene Aramaic and Greek to interpret the now-fragmentary Tax Law of Palmyra of 137, a text we discuss below (Matthews 1984; Shifman 2014). Another recent gain is the analysis and publication of local coins under the Roman Empire, since they can provide insight into local political conditions and self-representation at least among urban elites: in 2015 the valuable *Roman Provincial Coinage* series, begun in 1992 (http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/project/), published in print and online the volume covering Hadrian's reign. A third boon, tied to modern states' growing appreciation of classical antiquity and encouragement of international scholarship, is survey work on landscapes and water systems that can illuminate the conditions of individuals usually not represented in historical sources (e.g., https://www.romaq.org).

Such advances encourage a reassessment of Hadrian in Syria and the East. Despite the scattered nature of sources for him, Hadrian, born in 76 and emperor from 117 to 138, is well recognized for his restless curiosity into people and places, his wide travels, and his inconsistency, among other qualities (e.g., SHA, *Hadr*. 14.11). Our understanding of this compelling character has been facilitated by the two-volume commentary of his biography in the *Historia Augusta* (Fündling 2006; I refer to *Historia Augusta* as SHA), the thorough biography of Birley (1997), and other monographs (e.g., Boatwright 2000), as well as stunning exhibits on him at the British Museum in 2008 (Opper 2008) and at the Israel Museum in 2016 (http://museum.imj.org.il/en/exhibitions/2016/hadrian/). Much attention has gone to Hadrian and the Second Jewish Revolt of 132–135/136 (or Bar Kokhba War), which is tied to renaming the unsettled province of Judaea as Syria-Palaestina and supplanting Jerusalem by the Colonia Aelia Capitolina (see Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume, and further in this chapter). The many historical problems concerning that devastating conflict, however, should not eclipse other interventions by Hadrian in Rome's vast eastern provinces and dependencies.

This chapter presents chronologically the evidence for Hadrian in Syria and the East. Many undertakings are linked to his trip of 129–130, whose itinerary has recently been refined by Bak er (2012); Halfmann (1986) earlier brought out the importance of such journeys for the image of the emperor and the stability of the empire. But Hadrian attended to this region throughout his reign and even before. Perhaps unsurprisingly in light of his characterization in the ancient literary sources, Hadrian's activity was varied as he responded to the many peoples, diverse conditions, and real challenges of this extensive territory neighboring the Parthian Empire. Just

as significantly, the assembled evidence indicates that Hadrian conceived of Rome's eastern provinces as integral to a united empire that would thrive under his careful guidance, even if it were not a "Romanized" empire (*pace* Holum 1992; see *PRC* III, 3936–3939 and Meyers, Hendin, and Meyers 2015). The Bar Kokhba War spectacularly witnessed Hadrian's, and Rome's, failure in this objective.

Hadrian and the East before and in 117

Hadrian was already knowledgeable about the East when he was acclaimed emperor on 11 August 117 by Roman troops in Antioch, Syria (SHA, *Hadr.* 4.6). By then he had held numerous posts in the Roman army and probably had already developed his legendary and effective combination of discipline and camaraderie with the troops (SHA, *Hadr*. 10.2–11.1; Cass. Dio 69.9.2; Veg., *Mil*. 1.8, 27; *Epitome de Caesaribus* 14.11; Eutr. 8.7.2). His three military tribunates, in 94 or 95 with Legio II Adiutrix in Aquincum, Pannonia (near Budapest, Hungary), in 96–97 with Legio V Macedonica in Oescus, Moesia (Gigen, Bulgaria), and in 97–98 with Legio XXII Primigenia in Mogontiacum, Germania Superior (Mainz, Germany), just as his governorship of lower Pannonia at the end of the Second Dacian War (?106–108, again stationed in Aquincum), enabled Hadrian to know Syrians and other easterners serving in Rome's forces along the Danube and the Rhine. Pollard (2000, 133–134) and Tentea (2012) have analyzed the high numbers of eastern provincial soldiers in Rome's legions and auxiliary forces by Trajan's time. Hadrian's firsthand appreciation of Rome's multiethnic troops was undoubtedly reinforced when he served first as Trajan's companion, and then as legionary commander during the First and Second Dacian Wars (101–102, 105–106). As emperor, Hadrian, like Trajan before him, recruited Palmyrene archers for service elsewhere in the empire (e.g., Edwell 2008, 31, 50).

The fragmentary sources suggest strongly that Hadrian was with Trajan in the East during the Parthian War of 113–117. Not only did Hadrian's military experience recommend him but also his personal relationship with Trajan, who was his relative and former guardian as well as the great-uncle of Sabina, whom Hadrian had wed in 100. Hadrian's service in the war would have given him close familiarity with the region, especially the northern and far eastern areas. The activity in Trajan's war generally advanced from Syrian Antioch (Antakya, Turkey), the Roman military headquarters where Hadrian is attested in early 114 and again in the great earthquake of 115 (Ioh. Mal. 9.272, 11.207, 275; *Anth. Pal*. 6.332; Arr., *Parthica* fr. 36; Cass. Dio 68.24–25), into Greater Armenia, and down the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers to Ctesiphon and then to the Persian Gulf (see Birley 1997, 68–73). Hadrian would have attended the emperor's many formal meetings and banquets with kings, ambssaadors, and others from the area's different states and communities. The varied sources list at such venues kings, including Parthamasiris whose Parthian installation as king of Greater Armenia had sparked the war (Cass. Dio 68.19–20), and others from groups such as the Iberi, Sauromatae, Albani, Heniochi, Machelones, and peoples from Apsilia (Birley 1997, 69–73). By the end of the war the senate reportedly could not always understand or even correctly use the names of the many peoples Trajan cited in his official dispatches (Cass. Dio 68.29.2). The exacting Hadrian would have worked hard to prevent such ignorance.

Hadrian was appointed the new governor of Syria in 117 (Cass. Dio 68.33.1), as Trajan, now ill, was setting off to Rome to celebrate a triumph for the war. Hadrian had probably participated in the discussions leading to the formation of three new provinces by 116—Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria that extended Roman control along the Euphrates to Dura

Europos and perhaps beyond—as well as in the subsequent decision to abandon them. The renunciation of Rome's glorious expansion, with Rome limited to the Euphrates, was later blamed on Hadrian alone (e.g., SHA, *Hadr*. 9.1–2; Eutr. 8.6.1–2; cf. Fronto, *Principia historiae* 11, p. 209 van den Hout edition). This fits his later image as a consolidator who preferred well-defined frontiers (App., *Praefatio* 1.7; SHA, *Hadr*. 12.6) and may suggest the younger man's presence at the deliberations, although many scholars hold Trajan responsible (e.g., Birley 1997, 78). In any case, Trajan and his counselors must have realized Rome's weak hold on the immense and apparently inhospitable area (see, e.g., Cass. Dio 68.31). Just as important, by the war's end Romans were aware that Egypt, Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and the new province of Mesopotamia were violently disturbed by Jewish uprisings now often called the "Kitos War" or Revolt against Trajan, 115–117 (see Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume). Further, in 117 came news of serious unrest in Trajan's new province of Dacia above the Danube.

By 117 Hadrian had personal knowledge of Dacia, Syria, and other parts of the Roman world (he had served as archon in Athens in 112, for example). He was a fitting choice as governor for Syria, where he had served most recently. Trajan had not formally adopted Hadrian or otherwise clearly designated the younger man as his imperial successor, so speculations arose alleging opposition to Hadrian's elevation (SHA, *Hadr.* 4; Birley 1997, 75). Yet it could not have been surprising in August 117 that the dying emperor chose Syria's new governor, Hadrian, to succeed him as *princeps*. Hadrian had been designated to a second consulship in 118 (SHA, *Hadr.* 4.4); perhaps more important, he had wide familiarity with the empire. His troops in Syria quickly acclaimed him as Imperator on 11 August 117. Within two months he was on a circuitous route to Rome (*CIL* VI, 5076). In his twenty-one-year reign he would deepen and strengthen his connections throughout Rome's world, including in Syria and the East.

Hadrian's Visits to the East in 123 and 129–130, and Other Interactions

Hadrian was not to return to Syria and the East until he visited the province in early 123, and that visit, in which he swiftly went to meet with Parthians (presumably on the Euphrates) and check a mounting uprising (SHA, *Hadr*. 12.8), is very poorly known (Halfmann 1986, 197; Birley 1997, 153–156). In any case, however, the new emperor was surely kept apprised about Syria, Judaea, the new province of Arabia Petraea that Trajan had established in 106, and other Roman and non-Roman lands of the region. By 118, soon after leaving Syria, Hadrian restored a Parthian princess captured by Trajan in 116, and he deposed Trajan's choice as Parthian king, Parthamaspates. Leaving the Parthian throne vacant, he installed Parthamaspates in the small kingdom of Osrhoene in upper Mesopotamia (Birley 1997, 78, emending the name cited in SHA, *Hadr*. 5.4; SHA, *Hadr*. 13.8). News about this situation, as well as about other diplomatic and military changes in Syria and neighboring areas unsettled by Trajan's Parthian War, must have been regularly sent to Hadrian (see Edwell 2008, 20–23). Other reports must have streamed to the emperor. For example, Hadrian reestablished boundaries in the vast imperial holdings of cedar, pine, and juniper in what is modern Lebanon (*IGLS* VIII, 3; Sartre 2005, 208) and may have ordered a fortified road from the Black Sea to Melitene (modern Malatya, Turkey: Edwell 2008, 22–23). Such information may have been more prosaic but it was equally important for Rome's functioning.

Such evidence, and the high number of Hadrian's extant authoritative imperial decisions and pronouncements, validate his fame for closely supervising administration in Rome and the provinces (see, e.g., SHA, *Hadr*. 13.10; Burton 2002, 254–258). Hadrian is also alleged to have

corresponded with rabbis, even promising at the beginning of his reign that he would rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Although these stories are more than dubious, they correspond to other reports of the emperor's constant interactions with inhabitants throughout Rome's empire (Shahar 2021, 241–246).

In 129–130 Hadrian's travels brought him back east, in the only visit to this region by a Roman emperor without obvious military objectives (Sartre 2005, 132). The somewhat leisurely tour covered much more territory than had the trip in 123, although a lack of unequivocal evidence renders the exact itinerary unclear (see now Baker 2012). Stops have often been posited from various clues, such as the addition of *Hadriane* to a city's name (as in Petra: Birley 1997, 231) or a Hadrianeion or Shrine of Hadrian attested for a locale (in Tiberias and in Caesarea in Judaea: Holum 1992). Sometimes certainty has crept in from a mere suggestion made a century or more ago (as that Hadrian wintered in Antioch in 129/130: see Baker 2012, 161). Below appear only the stops with definite evidence, even though Hadrian undoubtedly made numerous small side trips that have left no permanent trace. (Orbis, http://orbis.stanford.edu, is invaluable for estimating routes and distances.) Hadrian was accompanied by his wife Sabina, his lover Antinous, and other close companions as well as the requisite functionaries, and Brennan (2018, 85) well illustrates the traveling court.

As in 114 and perhaps 123, Hadrian's entry point seems to have been Antioch. He may have wintered here, or perhaps farther south in Gerasa (Baker 2012, 161; Gerasa is now Jerash, Jordan). In Antioch a Festival of the Springs, later called the Hadrianeion, was dedicated on 23 June 129, a year also seeing the dedication of Hadrian's Temple of the Nymphs that was associated with imperial cult in the city (Ioh. Mal. 11.278.16; see Halfmann 1986, 206). Just as important for the city is Hadrian's aqueduct from Daphne, whose completion seems linked to baths or a nymphaeum (Ioh. Mal. 11.277.20–278.19; see De Giorgi, chapter 41, this volume). At this time Hadrian and his entourage also visited Arabia (SHA, *Hadr.* 14.4), the province that Trajan had established in 106, and Gerasa. This city built a large commemorative arch for Hadrian (Nassar 2014), although that is not clear evidence for his presence; more important, an inscription records that Hadrian held judicial court there (Welles in Kraeling 1938, 425, no. 144). Another inscription suggests that his personal guard, the Equites singulares Augusti, wintered in the city (Welles in Kraeling 1938, 390–391, no. 30 = EDCS-12200384).

Most scholars concur that in 129 or early 130 Hadrian was in Palmyra (Zahrnt 1986, 290–292). This splendid oasis city, apparently still independent, was key to trade between Rome and the far east (see Bobou, chapter 35, this volume). An inscription from the sanctuary of Baalshamin attests the hosting of the imperial entourage by the *grammateus* Malê (Yon 2012, 153–155, no. 145), an indication of the local ties and prestige Hadrian's journeys fostered. In Hadrian's honor, Palmyra added *Hadriane* to its name, as is documented on a few inscriptions, although the usage may have faded after his death (Edwell 2008, 50). Perhaps also marking respect for his imperial house, two of Palmyra's *tesserae* carry the image of Sabina (Salzmann 1989, with photos and references). Although Sabina's profiled depiction is modeled on coins, the unusual image of a historical person on such *tesserae* suggests her presence in the city. By now it was not unusual for imperial women to accompany emperors outside of Italy—Sabina's mother Matidia the Elder and great-aunt Plotina had traveled with Trajan to the Parthian war (SHA, *Hadr.* 4.10; Cass. Dio 69.1)—where their presence evidently emphasized the permanence and multifaceted nature of Rome's imperial court (Boatwright 2021, 248–280). Presumably while in Palmyra in 130 Hadrian made personal inquiries into the city's trade and relevant tariffs and regulations, gaining expertise for his sanctioning the Tax Law of Palmyra in 137 (for which see Matthews 1984; Shifman 2014). At some point he also attended to the borders of Palmyra's territory: an inscription from 153 attests a restoration of the borders of the "Palmyrene region" that had been established in accordance with a decree of Hadrian (*IGLS* V, 2550; see Edwell 20

08, 41–42). Yon (2012, 16) notes that Hadrian is one of the emperors most honored in Palmyra, with three dedications to him and a fourth inscription mentioning his visit.

Judaea was also on Hadrian's journey of 129–130. Hadrian was in Jerusalem in spring or summer 130; an inscription records that he wrote from that place (not yet named Aelia Capitolina) to Hierapolis in Syria (*SEG* LV, 1416, see esp. line 13). Baker (2012) has used this to argue for 130 as the time when Hadrian renamed the city Colonia Aelia Capitolina and began its rebuilding. That date, rather than Eusebius's of 136 (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6), is corroborated by Magness's recent review of numismatic and ceramic evidence (Magness 2011, 313; see Boatwright 2000, 196–203). A dedication in Latin to Hadrian from the Legio X Fretensis, stationed in Jerusalem, is also dated to 130; in limestone, the text may be from an arch or a statue pedestal (*CIIP* I.2, 00715 = EDCS 54900616, on display until at least 211). Hadrian is thought to have gone also to Gaza, since "Hadrianic games" (*panegyris Hadriane*) were established and in 130 the Hellenized city revamped its dating system (Halfmann 1986, 112). It is reasonable to assume that from Gaza, Hadrian and his entourage went either by the coastal road or a shorter boat ride to Egypt, where the first documented stop is Pelusium (SHA, *Hadr*. 14.4; Cass. Dio 69.11.1; near Port Said, Egypt). Unless we accept the unlikely surmise that Hadrian returned to Judaea during the Bar Kokhba War (see Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume; Birley 1997, 272–273; Halfmann 1986, 207), he did not visit Syria and the East again before dying in 138 in Baiae, Italy.

Overall, Hadrian's visit to Syria and neighboring provinces in 129–130 resembles his journeys and local activities elsewhere (Boatwright 2000). His curiosity brought him to unusual sites, as Mount Casius near the mouth of the Orontes, which he ascended at night so that he could see the sun rise (SHA, *Hadr*. 14.3), or Palmyra, a city on the edges of Roman control. He performed religious rites, as when on Mount Casius he supervised a sacrifice (and was miraculously saved in a lightning storm: SHA, *Hadr*. 14.3), and he validated the centrality of imperial cult, as in Antioch and in the refounding of Jerusalem as Colonia Aelia Capitolina. Throughout his eastern trip, Hadrian conspicuously displayed imperial beneficence, as in his religious and practical constructions in Antioch and his public judgments in Gerasa (cf. Bryen 2012). He encouraged the Graeco-Roman culture of the region by his buildings and Gaza's new games. Such demonstrations of imperial interest in his subjects' lives were flashier than the characteristic care he also took to ensure taxes came in regularly, as with the trees in Lebanon. His attention to such mundane concerns throughout the empire, during his travels and in the capital alike, underlies his achievements as emperor.

The East in the Hadrianic Vision of Empire (the "Provincial" Coins)

Various stunning coin types with Hadrian on the obverse, struck in Rome and usually dated to 134–138, celebrate on their reverse eastern locations as well as provinces and cities elsewhere. The different coin types feature over twenty provinces or locales (including two cities, Alexandria and Nicomedia; two rivers, the Nile and the Tiber; and Italy and Sicilia). They show Rome's provinces as personified women as they commemorate the province overall or, more specifically, Hadrian as the province's restorer (*restitutor*), or at his arrival (his *adventus*) in it (Toynbee 1934; Schachinger 1997, 100–106; Zahrnt 2007). Judaea is well attested. *Sestertii* depict a standing female figure sacrificing over an altar and accompanied by three children (with palms) who greet Hadrian. The legend is IVDAEA S C (Judaea, by decree of the senate: *RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, nos. 1774–1775; see Eck 1999, 76). *Sestertii* and smaller denominations also celebrate his arrival in the province, with a similar design and ADVENTVI AVG IVDAEAE S

C on the reverse (In honor of the arrival of the emperor in Judaea, by decree of the senate: *RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, nos. 1768–1773).

Arabia also figures on *sestertii* and lower-denomination coins struck in Rome. Five similar types laud Hadrian's *adventus* to the new province: the reverse legend ADVENTVI AVG ARABIAE S C surrounds the depiction of Hadrian, togate and raising his right hand to Arabia, who faces him while sacrificing over an altar (In honor of the arrival of the emperor in Arabia, by decree of the senate: *RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, nos. 1731–1736). Others celebrate Hadrian as restorer of the province: here the reverses depict a togate Hadrian holding a scroll in his left hand and extending his right to raise up Arabia, who kneels facing him while holding a bundle of cinnamon or incense sticks. A camel is in the center, and the legend reads RESTITVTORI ARABIAE S C (For the restorer of Arabia, by decree of the senate: *RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, nos. 1823–1826).

Syria is represented not by an *adventus* or *restitutor* type, but by its Roman army. *Sestertii* show Hadrian on horseback addressing three or four soldiers holding military standards or a military eagle emblem (*aquila*), and the legend EXERC(itus) SYRIAC(us) S C (The Syrian army, by decree of the senate: *RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, no. 1968, see nos. 1959–1960). The type prompts recollection of Hadrian's own military service in the province before he was made emperor in 117, and perhaps also the Syrian troops' acclamation of him as emperor. Again, however, the Syrian army coins are not unique: the Roman mint issued similar *sestertii* honoring the army in Britain, Dacia, and Raetia (*RIC*^{2} II.3 Hadrian, nos. 1918–1919; 1929–1930; and 1954–1955, respectively), for example, all from the same period as the Syrian coins.

The numismatic evidence overall suggests how essential the eastern provinces were in the thinking of Hadrianic Rome. Like Achaia, Africa, Asia, Hispania, Macedonia, and other provinces and geographical areas, Arabia was shown as gaining from Hadrian's governance. Its actual need for "restoration" was probably minimal: it had been a province for only two decades or so. More dissonant, however, must have been the inclusion of Judaea in the various provincial series of 134–138. By 132, the Bar Kokhba War had broken out, not to be fully settled until 136 (for date, see Eck 1999, 87–88; Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume). Even in antiquity Hadrian was deemed responsible for this bloody, recalcitrant struggle (Cass. Dio 69.12.1–2; SHA, *Hadr*. 14.2; see Schäfer 2003). Coins with Judaea and her children welcoming Hadrian's arrival must have appeared absurd to those in Rome and Italy who knew about the devastation of Judaea and the high Roman casualties there (see Cass. Dio 69.13–14.3).

The Image of Hadrian in the East

Perhaps nothing conveys the ambivalence of my topic so much as two extraordinary finds from Tel Shalem in northern Israel. Tel Shalem, 12 km south of Scythopolis (modern Bet Shean, Israel), housed a Roman military fort of a unit of the Legio VI Ferrata, one of the two Roman legions permanently stationed in Judaea by about 117. Although archaeologists earlier concluded that this fort was out of use after the middle of the second century (Foerster 1985, 139), newer excavations show it functioned into the third. It was built over a smaller fort originally constructed in the late first or early second century (Arubas et al. 2019; Ecker et al. 2019). The Hadrianic finds discussed further in this chapter suggest the larger second-century fort relates somehow to the Bar Kokhba revolt.

FIGURE 20.1. Statue of the emperor Hadrian, from the camp of the Sixth Roman Legion Ferrata at Tel Shalem, Beth Shean Valley, **AD** 117–138. Bronze and lead; H. 83 cm, W. 75 cm. (Collection of the Israel Antiquities Authority, IAA 1975-763; photograph by John Williams and Saul Peckham © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.)

Remains of a half-figure bronze portrait of the emperor (fig. 20.1) were found in what may be the fort's *sacellum* (or sanctuary). This Tel Shalem portrait is now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (inv. no. IAA 1975–763, H 83, W 75 cm). The handsome face and head resemble known Hadrianic portraits but are better quality than most other extant bronze heads of him (Foerster 1985, 141–143; Gergel 1991, 235–236). The cuirass, of less careful execution, is very unusual. Its figured decoration, showing three pairs of naked warriors rather than a gorgon's head or another common motif, is placed high on the chest, with nothing below other than a finely rendered *cingulum* or military belt. Arguing particularly from the warriors' helmets, Foerster (1985, 151–157) proposed that the cuirass depicted the Battle of Aeneas and Turnus and signaled, after Hadrian's suppression of the "non-Roman" Bar Kokhba War, a return to concord for the Roman people. Six years after Foerster's initial publication, Gergel (1991) re-investigated the sculpture, focusing especially on the cuirass. Stressing its many stylistic peculiarities, he concluded the statue combined a contemporaneous head and right arm of Hadrian with repurposed elements of at least one other bronze piece from the late Hellenistic age.

This interpretation seems generally accepted (Weber 2015), although it leaves open many questions. By contradicting Foerster's argument that the cuirass referred to Rome's victory in the Bar Kokhba War, Gergel reopens the dating and context of the statue. Was the portrait installed at this fort, only some 42 km west-north-west of Gerasa, while Hadrian travelled in the East in 130? Was it raised in 136 to commemorate Rome's suppression of the revolt under Hadrian? If so, given the ruthlessness with which the war was waged, it is unfortunate that scholars have paid little heed to all its elements. A bronze head of a youth was also among the forty-two bronze fragments found at the site. It is not displayed with Hadrian's portrait, perhaps because it is generic rather than individualized. A recent suggestion identifies the head as of the young Emperor Gordion III, who came to power in AD 238, but the piece needs further study (Arubas et al. 2019, 202). If the head can be shown as original to the Hadrianic display, Hadrian's portrait at Tel Shalem may have resembled the standing cuirassed statue from Hierapytna, Crete, that represents Hadrian pitilessly resting his left foot on a cowering youth (Gergel 1991, 233–235). In sum, the Tel Shalem piece, an unusually fine portrait of the Roman emperor responsible for much of Judaea's destruction, remains a puzzle.

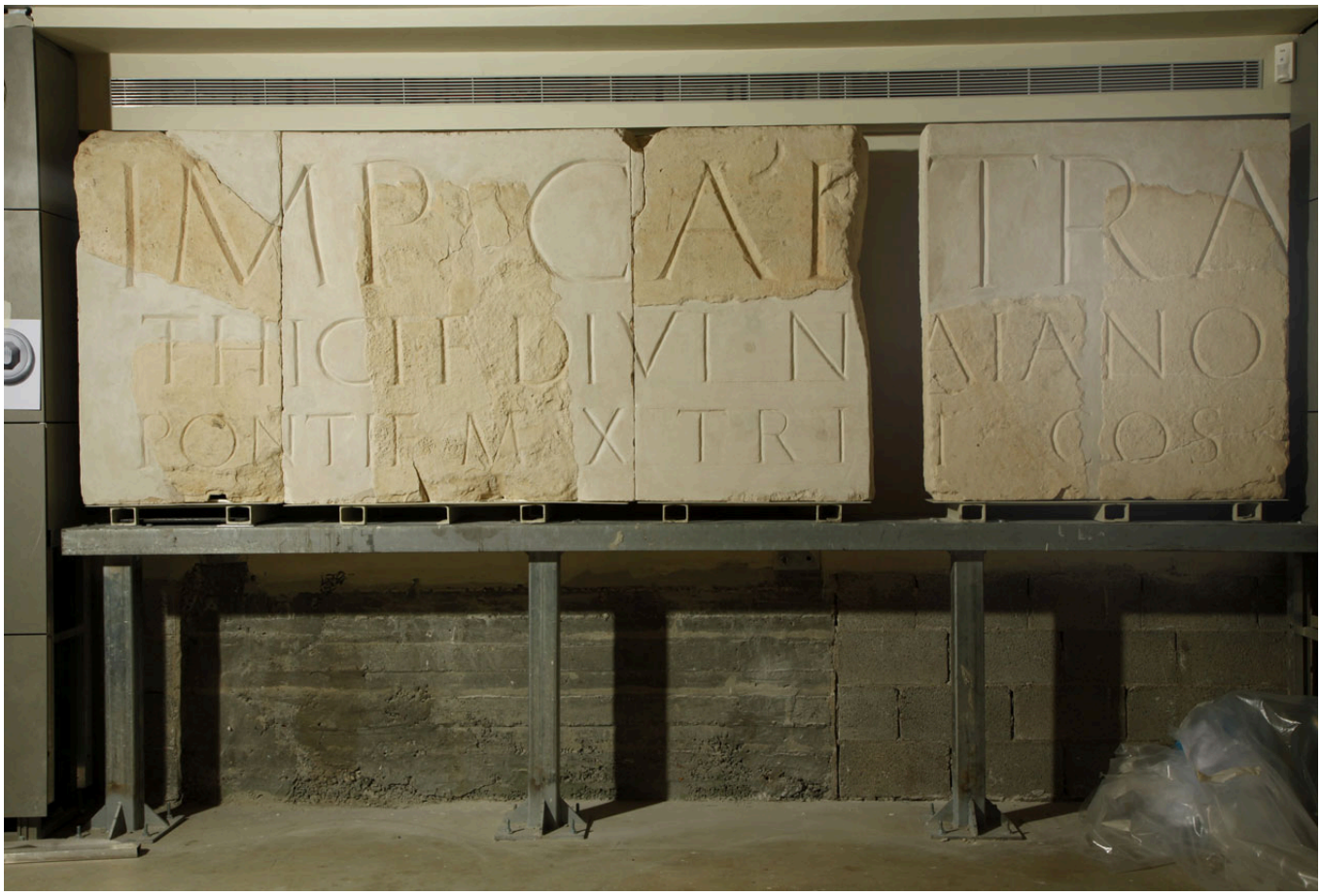

FIGURE 20.2. Inscription from a triumphal arch dedicated to Hadrian, Tirat Zvi, Beth Shean Valley, mid-second century **AD**. Limestone; H. 124 cm, W. 386 cm. (Collection of the Israel Antiquities Authority, IAA 1977-524; photograph by Abraham Hay © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.)

Another unusual find from Tel Shalem has opened even more controversy about Hadrian and his impact on Syria and the East. Fragments of an enormous Latin marble dedication, excavated in the 1970s but published in the 1990s, have provoked debates about the intensity, geographical extent, and chronology of the Bar Kokhba War, as well as about the date and purpose of the inscription itself that is now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (inv. no. IAA 1977–524/1–6, H 124, W 386, D 19 cm). The three-line inscription is extraordinarily large—letter heights range from 41 cm in its first line to 18–19 in its third—and its original length has been calculated as some 10–11 m wide (see fig. 20.2). Eck has contributed variously on the fragmentary inscription (esp. 1999; 2003; also 2014), including a joint publication on the victory arch from which he presumes it came (Eck and Foerster 1999). His reconstruction of the missing text argues that in 136, at the earliest, the Roman state ([SPQR], line 3) erected the arch to honor Hadrian. That would date the final suppression of the Bar Kokhba War to 136. This and other related evidence support his forceful contention that the war was more extensive and destructive than previously thought. Bowersock (2003) has challenged Eck's reconstruction of the epigraphic text, though conceding his points about the war's widespread violence. Others, however, are more opposed: on archaeological grounds, for instance, Mor has argued against Eck's (and Bowersock's) contention that the war spread beyond Judaea into Arabia and Syria (Eck 1999, 83–86; Bowersock 2003; Mor 2013, a summary article). In any case, the enormous dedication to Hadrian and the enigma of its apparent original location

emphasize the value of new finds for our understanding of the early second century in this important region.

Conclusions

Hadrian's most obvious representation in Syria and the East was as a military leader, and his bronze cuirassed statue from Tel Shalem is particularly striking. Such an image, however, is not surprising. He served in Syria and neighboring areas during Trajan's Parthian war, and at Antioch he was acclaimed emperor by Roman troops while he was the new governor of Syria. Further, he knew well the area's external and internal problems that demanded military action, from restive Parthians and vassal states, through rebellious Jews in Mesopotamia during the Kitos Rebellion of 115–117, to the fierce Bar Kokhba War of 132–135/136 in Judaea and its environs. But Hadrian also displayed a peaceful *persona* here. His trip to the region in 129–130 allowed him to ascertain local conditions and needs as far east as Palmyra, to demonstrate imperial beneficence, and to model himself and the court for others. This more steady and constructive work was at least as significant for Rome's stability and longevity as an emperor's military feats. Hadrian was well primed for such routine detail. His thoroughness and his conception of a united and consolidated empire were generally beneficial for Rome, although they apparently caused him to stumble fatally with Jerusalem and Judaea.

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CHAPTER 21

THE SEVERANS

A Near Eastern Roman Empire?

JULIA HOFFMANN-SALZ

When Septimius Severus, at the time governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, married a woman from Syria in AD 187, little did the world know that this would be the beginning of a new dynasty of Roman rulers, ultimately comprising five emperors. This dynasty would have a profound impact on the Roman Empire and on the Roman Near East. Because of the Syrian background of Severus's wife, Iulia Domna, and the role her family would come to play in the dynasty, it is sometimes claimed that the Severans turned the Roman Empire into a Near Eastern Roman Empire (see discussion in Rowan 2012)—but as the following pages will show, it was not the geographical background of the family but the political and military demands of the time that shaped Severan policies both in the Near East and in the empire as a whole. Disentangling these demands and their impact on the decisions of the Severan emperors from assumptions about their presumed geographically determined intentions has therefore been an important aspect of any modern study of the Severan dynasty.

This study is hampered by challenging sources. The only eyewitness account is the *Roman History* by Cassius Dio, that is only extant in part. Cassius Dio, a senator from Asia Minor, tends to be rather favorable toward the last Severan ruler, Severus Alexander, with whom he shared his second consulate in ad 229, but was critical of his predecessors. Herodian and the biographies of the Severan emperors in the *Historia Augusta*, that are several generations later, follow their own agendas, too, and this is also true of later sources such as Eutropius, Festus, Orosius, Aurelius Victor, or Ammianus Marcellinus (Kemezis 2014; Palermo 2019). New studies of the documentary sources such as coins, inscriptions, and papyri, but also archaeological remains, have therefore been instrumental to our understanding of the dynasty (e.g., Rowan 2 012; Lusnia 2014; Langford 2013).

Septimius Severus

Septimius Severus was born in AD 146 in Leptis Magna in North Africa as the son of an equestrian of local Punic origin. Through the patronage of two paternal cousins who had been Roman consuls, Severus came to Rome and pursued a successful but not extraordinary career in the *cursus honorum*. During his governorship of Gallia Lugdunensis in AD 187, Severus married his second wife Iulia Domna, who was from Emesa in Syria. The *Historia Augusta* tells us that Severus, who is generally portrayed as very interested in horoscopes, chose Iulia Domna because he heard of her birth horoscope that predicted she would marry a future ruler (SHA, *Sev*. 3.9). Their eldest child, the future Emperor Caracalla, was born in Lugdunum in AD 188, his brother Geta in AD 189 in Rome. Shortly afterward, Severus was appointed governor of Pannonia Superior by the emperor Commodus. When Commodus was assassinated in AD 192 and his replacement Pertinax was killed soon after, Septimius Severus was proclaimed emperor by his Pannonian legions. In the following civil war, Septimius Severus managed to persevere

against three opponents in what was later called the Second Year of the Four Emperors. One of these opponents was the popular governor of Syria, Pescennius Niger, who had also been proclaimed emperor by his troops. By spring of 194, Severus and his trusted commanders had managed to defeat the armies of Pescennius Niger, who was captured and killed near Antioch (Ando 2012, 18–28).

The apparent widespread support for Pescennius Niger forced Severus to take further action in the East, which would have a transformative effect on the region on different levels: first, he punished or rewarded cities according to their stance in his conflict with Pescennius Niger by awarding colonial status to those that had sided with him, like Tyre and Heliopolis, and taking away privileges from those that had supported his opponent. Worst off was Antioch, which lost its status as the provincial capital and metropolis of the four Syrian districts of the imperial cult to its neighbor Laodicea on the Sea and was only rehabilitated in ad 197. Severus had also learned from the usurpation of Niger that there were too many troops under the command of the governor of Syria. Consequently, the province of Syria was divided into two provinces—Syria Coele with its capital in Antioch (after its rehabilitation) and Syria Phoenice with its new capital in Tyre, promoted to Colonia Septimia Tyrus (Aliquot, chapter 15, this volume). In general, Severus took great care to show appreciation for the military with a significant pay rise and frequent financial rewards. This, no doubt, was also a consequence of his own path to power that he intended to block for others (Speidel, chapter 16, this volume, on the army in Syria).

The division of Syria into two smaller provinces was born from political and military necessity, but together with the promotion and punishment of the cities and the resulting changes in status it would have a profound effect on the inhabitants of the Roman Near East. It disrupted established networks and created new patterns of movement with people traveling to the new provincial capital to do business with Roman officials, and craftsmen favoring newly privileged cities for the opportunities of building projects since they could expect imperial patronage, etc.

This development was spurred on by the continuing presence of the emperor in the Near East. Pescennius Niger had secured the support of neighboring kings and the Parthians. This, and the question of the loyalty of the eastern legions whom his troops had just defeated, prompted Septimius Severus to lead two campaigns east. The rulers of Adiabene, Osrhoene, and Hatra, that had originally supported Niger, had turned against Roman garrisons in Mesopotamia claiming to kill supporters of Niger for Severus (Cass. Dio 75.1.2–3). The death of Roman soldiers at the hands of supposed allies and the usurpation of territory evident in the siege of Nisibis made a punitive expedition inevitable (Gradoni 2013). In the first half of ad 195, Severus and his army marched east, with the ruler of Osrhoene immediately offering hostages and troops for the campaign. After relieving the siege of Nisibis, Severus marched his troops across the Tigris where they captured Arbela, capital of the kingdom of Adiabene. While on campaign, Severus was informed that his last opponent from the Year of the Four Emperors, the governor of Britain Clodius Albinus, had finally realized that his understanding with Severus to become his successor was not reliable and marched his troops to Gaul, where Severus managed a decisive victory near Lugdunum in February ad 197. During his absence from the East, the Parthian king Vologases V started a counteroffensive, retaking Adiabene and besieging Nisibis. Larger operations apparently had to be abandoned because Vologases also faced a rebellion, which he managed to subdue. Meanwhile Severus had returned to the East. After first attacking the kingdom of Armenia, which surrendered, Severus again relieved the besieged Nisibis. Splitting his forces into three columns, Severus rapidly advanced on Ctesiphon with the main body of his army. Ctesiphon fell, was ransacked, and the population sold into slavery (Edwell 2008, 26–29). While the two other columns of his army fought in Adiabene and eastern Mesopotamia, Severus turned back north and laid siege to Hatra, which he failed to

take twice (on Hatra, see Dirven, chapter 34, this volume). Already in ad 195 Severus had established a new province of Osrhoene, while the city territory of Edessa was left under the control of its former king. Sometime between ad 195 and 197, Severus also established a province of Mesopotamia, that was given two legions under an equestrian prefect. Four cities—Carrhae, Nisibis, Rhesaena, and Singara—received colonial status and were to function as a line of defense against future Parthian encroachment. The cities also controlled and exploited their hinterland, where smaller settlements housed a population focused on agriculture. Roman troops were garrisoned in the cities and also in secondary settlements along major communication arteries, Roman administrative personnel were active throughout the two new provinces as shown by inscriptions collected by Palermo (2019). Again, as with the reorganization of the Syrian provinces, these administrative measures changed existing social, economic, and religious networks in the region and created new patterns of movement and integration, making the Severan period one of intense transformation for the region. What it does not show, however, is a particular personal connection of Severus to the Near East, since he bestowed equal attention to a reorganization of Egypt and later North Africa and Britain. On the contrary, the Syrian background of his much-promoted wife Iulia Domna seems to have been deliberately ignored.

Iulia Domna

Iulia Domna was the daughter of one Iulius Bassianus, a member of the local elite of Emesa, a town in central Syria. Since Emesa has never been systematically explored and is rarely mentioned in the literary sources, we know very little about the history of the town and about the possible family connections of Iulia Domna. Syria had seen a number of families enter the Roman senate during the Antonine period (Andrade 2013, 314–315), but it is unclear how far Iulia Domna's family was connected to these.

Iulia's Syrian background is only remarked upon in passing in the literary sources (SHA, *Sev.* 3.9), but older scholarship has placed significance on this, calling her a "Syrian empress" and claiming that she and her female relatives brought oriental influences to Rome and the empire (discussion in Levick 2007; Rowan 2012). Iulia Domna, however, was given a prominent role in the propaganda of Septimius Severus, that effaced her geographical background and stressed her role as empress of the Roman Empire. This role was determined by the threefold strategy of legitimization of Severus, who tried to anchor his rule in the past by a fictional adoption by Marcus Aurelius in ad 195, to justify his rule in the present through his own leadership and that of his family and to offer a dynastic perspective for the future by promoting his wife and sons. Adopting himself into the family of Marcus Aurelius, Severus also attempted a visual connection to the Antonine heritage. This is apparent in the coin types struck for Iulia Domna that strongly associate her with motifs and goddesses already established for empresses of the Antonine dynasty (Rowan 2011). Iulia Domna was also granted titles that Marcus Aurelius's wife Faustina had already been given: she was called *mater castrorum* and *mater senatus* like Faustina before her, but also *mater patriae*, a variant of the emperor's *pater patriae* title not previously used (Langford 2013). Severus also launched a major building program in Rome with monuments such as the Septizodium or the Severan Arch on the Forum Romanum, that again showed his adherence to Roman imperial traditions as well as his own achievements in the present and the dynastic potential of his family (Lusnia 2014). Promoting this dynastic perspective led to a high visibility of both Iulia Domna and the sons in the coinage and official portraiture of Severus, that is mirrored in dedicatory inscriptions and other media (fig. 21.1.).

FIGURE 21.1. Carnelian ring stone, ca. **AD** 208–209, showing Septimius Severus and Iulia Domna opposite their two sons Caracalla and Geta, image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

But it was Severus's propaganda decisions and their reception by the target audiences that determined this and it is debatable whether high visibility in propaganda equaled real political power for his wife. Dio reports that Plautianus, a long-term friend and supporter of Severus, who Severus made praetorian prefect, gained such influence over the emperor that he could cast aspersions on Iulia Domna's character without Severus intervening. She, Dio writes, turned to the study of philosophy, staying away from her husband (Cass. Dio 75.6–7). However, an interest in philosophy also continued traditions of the empresses of the Antonine dynasty and may thus have been part of the imperial propaganda. In any case, an interest in philosophy was not connected to Domna's Syrian background and, more importantly, the story in Dio depicts her as someone who quietly accepts the authority and decisions of men. This is ideal Roman matronly behavior; there are no eastern influences here. The same kind of ideal behavior is also repeated in connection with her two sons.

Geta

Iulia Domna's sons were from very early on integrated into rule and propaganda of their father but given noticeably different positions. When Severus adopted himself into the family of Marcus Aurelius, his eldest son Caracalla was also included in this adoption and given the new name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, while the younger Geta was not included and continued to be called Publius Septimius Geta. After the capture of Ctesiphon and his victory over Clodius Albinus, Severus promoted Caracalla from Caesar to Augustus and Geta to Caesar. When

Severus returned to Rome in AD 202, the celebration of his *decennalia* pushed Geta to the sidelines as his elder brothers' marriage to Plautilla, daughter of Severus' close ally Plautianus, was prominently celebrated. However, in the *ludi saeculares* celebrated in AD 204, Geta, too, played a prominent role. Together with Severus, Caracalla, and Plautianus, he was named co-organizer of the festivities and participated in all the major sacrifices of the festival (*CIL* VI, 32326–32335; Rantala 2017). In AD 205 and 208 both sons held the consulate together.

The brothers' constant fighting—and/or a fear of an idle army creating unrest (both claimed by Dio/Xiphilinus 76.7.3–4)—prompted Severus to embark on a campaign to Britain in ad 208, which had not received any imperial attention since the usurpation of Claudius Albinus. On campaign, Geta was promoted to Augustus in ad 209, thus to the same rank as his brother, but they were both given different tasks: while Caracalla accompanied his father on campaign beyond the provincial boundaries, Geta stayed in the province and was tasked with administrative duties. But all three *Augusti* took on the name *Britannicus Maximus* in ad 210. When Severus died in ad 211, his final words to his sons according to Dio were "to love each other, make the soldiers rich and despise all others" (Cass. Dio 77.15.2) suggesting that Severus knew of the trouble between his sons. However, the brothers returned to Rome separately and took residence in two different wings of the imperial palace. Herodian records that they even contemplated splitting the empire to give each his own realm (Hdn. 4.3.8–9). This was apparently prevented by Iulia Domna—the only instance where she is given any political agency in the literary sources and in a case where she again showed her qualities as a true Roman mother mediating between her sons. Her influence was soon crushed, however, when Caracalla tricked her and Geta into a meeting where he had Geta killed in Iulia Domna's arms (Cass. Dio 78.2.3–6; SHA, *Carac*. 21.6–7). Reevaluating the coinage for Geta and Caracalla, Kemmers can make a convincing case that this conflict was not (only) pure sibling rivalry but rather a power struggle between two factions in the imperial court with the brothers each championed by one of these factions (Kemmers 2011).

Caracalla

Already during the lifetime of Severus, Caracalla is portrayed in the literary sources as a proactive heir who reluctantly accepted marriage to the daughter of his father's trusted friend Plautianus, but managed to accuse him of treason and have him executed in AD 205 (Cass. Dio 77 [76].4). It is in Dio's account of Caracalla that we see the first actual connection of the geographical background of the Severan family and their policy in the literary sources. Dio reports that Caracalla belonged to three *ethné* and showed only their negative characteristics: the inconstancy and cowardice of the Gauls as he was born in Lugdunum, the cruelty of the Africans from his father's side, and the cunning of the Syrians from his mother's side (Cass. Dio 78.6.1a). In Herodian's assessment Severus had won the civil war against Pescennius Niger because Niger had troops from Syria who were easily persuaded to revolt, eager to corrupt proper Romans, and useless in battle, while Severus had his trusted Pannonian soldiers, who were a little dumb but knew how to fight (Hdn. 2.7.9; 2.10.7; 3.4.3). Comparing these accounts, it becomes clear that ancient sources used these geographical *topoi* however it suited their narrative. Since Caracalla not only had his own brother killed but also purged the Roman upper classes of supporters of his brother, which apparently cost the lives of twenty thousand people (Cass. Dio 78 [77].4.1), a negative reception of his reign in the senatorial order that prompted topical stereotyping in the literary sources is not surprising.

Caracalla tried hard to dispel this shadow, e.g., by building the famous baths in Rome (Gensheimer 2018) and also by continuing the significant role of his mother Iulia Domna in imperial propaganda. Her coin types promoted continuity of the dynasty, no doubt a significant part of Caracalla's propaganda to cover up the murder of his brother (Rowan 2011). Again, the literary sources show a powerless Iulia Domna, trying but failing to curb her son's excesses (Cass. Dio 78.10.4). No doubt this was to show Iulia Domna as the proper Roman mother and Caracalla as the tyrannical son unfit to rule the empire. More complex are the reports in Dio that Caracalla gave Iulia Domna an official role in dealing with his correspondence and even receiving prominent personages (Cass. Dio 77.18.2–4). This actually gives the empress political agency and real power. However, seen in the context of Dio's generally very negative attitude to Caracalla, this is more likely a literary construction to show the weakness of Caracalla. But Iulia Domna continued to play a visible role next to her son.

Three activities of Caracalla's reign were of particular importance to the Roman Near East: first, he continued his father's policy of awarding colonial status to cities in the region, in particular to Emesa, his mother's hometown. Edessa, that his father had left to the rule of the former king of all of Osrhoene, was annexed to the empire in ad 213 and given colonial status (see Aliquot, chapter 15, this volume). Second, in ad 212, he granted Roman citizenship to every free inhabitant of the Roman Empire apart from the *dediticii* with the famous *constitutio Antoniniana* (P. Gissensis 1,40). Dio, the only contemporary source, claims that Caracalla took this measure to create more income for the state treasury (Cass. Dio 77.9.5). Caracalla evidently did try to generate money by raising taxes such as the inheritance tax and the tax on manumission of slaves and in ad 214/215 introduced a new silver coinage called *Antoninianus* that had less silver than the two *denarii* it was to replace. This was necessary because of yet another pay rise for the army. However, granting citizenship to the free inhabitants of the empire seems more closely connected to the murder of Geta shortly beforehand. This event was probably also referenced in the introductory passage of the edict, where Caracalla states that it was passed in gratitude to the gods for saving him from danger—probably the official wording for the murder of Geta. With the edict, Caracalla at once created a huge new clientele for himself that was surely hoped to feel particularly loyal to him (Brandt 2021, 443–446). But the effects on the inhabitants of the empire and in particular of the Near East cannot be underestimated as it opened up new opportunities for participation for the local inhabitants: as Roman citizens, they were now able to join the Roman legions, no longer forced to serve the longer terms in auxiliary troops with less pay. And they were also subject to Roman citizen law with in particular *ius commercium* offering new business opportunities and *ius conubium* allowing new personal ties. More than ever before, the inhabitants of the Near East would have felt like Romans, leading to new constructions of identity and self-expression (Andrade 2013, 319–320).

Third, Caracalla also continued his father's tradition of war against the Parthians. After successful campaigns on the German *limes* and on the Danube in ad 213 and 214, he started a Parthian war in ad 215. A first campaign in Armenia was not entirely successful but in ad 216, Roman troops captured Arbela. While preparing a new campaign in February ad 217, a growing disaffection among the commanding officers led to a conspiracy and the praetorian prefect Marcus Opellius Marcinus had the emperor killed while Caracalla was on his way to the famous Moon sanctuary at Carrhae. Iulia Domna died of an illness shortly afterward, and her sister and family were exiled to Emesa.

Macrinus was an equestrian and even in the army, his acclamation as emperor was not universally welcomed since Caracalla had been very popular with the soldiers. His attempts to propagate his son and himself as successors of the Severans were unsuccessful, and his handling of peace negotiations with the Parthians and the many soldiers still stationed temporarily in Syria left much to be desired (Cass. Dio 78.26–27; McHugh 2017). Meanwhile in Emesa, and therefore in easy distance of the dissatisfied Roman troops, Iulia Domna's sister Iulia Mamaea had considerable financial resources at her disposal—and her two grandsons by her daughters Iulia Soemias and Iulia Mamaea: Varius Avitus, the future Emperor Elagabal, and Bassianus Alexander, the future Emperor Severus Alexander. Their tenuous connection to the Severan dynasty was bolstered by rumors that Varius Avitus was in fact an illegitimate son of Caracalla. Avitus, who was about fourteen years old, was too young to hold any office, but the family had a hereditary high priesthood of the local cult of Elagabal in Emesa. Giving Avitus this high priesthood allowed him to publicly perform rituals attended not only by the citizens of Emesa and visitors from other cities in Syria, but also by soldiers from the legion stationed at Raphaneia. This made him known to a wider audience and showed this audience that here was an alternative to Macrinus. Very quickly, in May 218, the champions of Avitus managed to have him proclaimed emperor in the camp of the legion in Raphaneia. No doubt, considerable financial transactions were made to the legion for this, but the speed with which Macrinus was defeated near Antioch in June 218 and later killed on a desperate and lonely flight in Asia Minor show that many were all too ready to welcome a member of the Severan family back on the throne (Ando 2012, 63–66).

The literary sources and their reading by older scholarship have painted a very negative picture of the new emperor and this is particularly connected to his Syrian descent and the role he allegedly attributed to his position as high priest of the god Elagabal in Emesa. The fact that we use this god's name for the emperor, whose official name was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, shows the dramatic impact this has for a long time had on our perception of his reign (Icks 2008). However, the emperor was most likely born in Rome and only resided in Emesa from shortly after the death of Caracalla in spring ad 217 to his own ascension to power in May 218. The decision to promote *Sol Propugnator* on one of his first coin series must therefore be seen less as a first step to introduce "his" god Elagabal, who was also a sun god, into "state religion" and more as a natural move to thank the god that his supporters associated him with and expected him to honor. After the new emperor was officially accepted by the senate, the family stayed on at Antioch before traveling via Asia Minor to Rome, where they arrived in summer ad 219. This time must have been used to ensure the loyalty of the army, which was essential for the survival of the new regime, and its evident success was no small feat. Herodian tells us that while in Asia Minor, the emperor sent an image of himself in the dress of high priest of Elagabal to the senate to be displayed in the *curia* to accustom the Romans to his eastern look (Hdn. 5.5.5–8). But not only is Herodian hostile to the emperor, but images of emperors in religious dress beyond the *toga capite velato*, iconic since Augustus, may have been far more widespread in the empire as Septimius Severus, Iulia Domna, and their sons also seem to wear some kind of religious ceremonial dress on the famous Severan tondo found in Egypt (fig. 21.2).

FIGURE 21.2. The Severan Tondo depicting Septimius Severus, Iulia Domna and their two sons, Geta has been deliberately erased, found in Egypt, today in the Antikesammlung, Berlin, image courtesy of bpk/Antikesammlung, SMB/Johannes Laurentius.

This tondo and other evidence suggests that painted images of the emperor and his family were displayed and even officially distributed throughout the empire, and Herodian may very well have "orientalized" this common practice to deliberately slander the emperor. Dio Cassius, Herodian, and the *Vita Heliogabali* in the *Historia Augusta* corpus all depict the emperor in a combination of well-known literary *topoi* of (oriental) tyrants with deviant sexual behavior,

excessive consumption of food, love of luxury, cruelty, and breaking of religious traditions (Mader 2005).

At Rome, the emperor and his family—for it is impossible to say who made the decisions on propaganda and policy—followed established patterns of coin motifs and activities to garner the support of the relevant groups of senators, soldiers, and the *plebs urbana*. Iulia Maesa, as the grandmother of the emperor, was given a prominent place in the emperor's propaganda and coinage, while the emperor's mother Iulia Soemias or his wives were significantly less visible. Maesa's coin types promoted typical Roman female virtues such as *pudicitia* and *pietas*. However, Iulia Soemias's coins have as an almost exclusive reverse type a new goddess, *Venus Caelestis*, that was used neither before nor after the emperor's reign. This leads Rowan to conclude that it could be connected to the cult of the god Elagabal (Rowan 2011). This cult was given increasing visibility in imperial propaganda and coinage from ad 220 onward, when the senate awarded the emperor the title *sacerdos amplissimus* of *deus Invictus Sol Elagabalus* (e.g., *CIL* X, 5827). This new title was used in inscriptions in place of the victory names usually employed by Roman emperors such as *Parthicus*, *Germanicus*, etc., that the emperor had not yet achieved. It may have been intended to promote instead a general and permanent invincibility protected by *Sol Invictus Elagabalus*. The emperor also repurposed a sanctuary already begun by his predecessors northeast of the Palatine in Rome as an *Elagabalium* and erected a second sanctuary for the god close to a Severan palace complex in the *suburbium*. The *Elagabalium* was to house the holy stone that was understood as a manifestation of the god from Emesa. The emperor had brought this stone with him to Rome, where it was placed in its new sanctuary and festivals and rituals were introduced that included a procession of the holy stone between the two sanctuaries (Hdn. 5.2–6).

Promoting the god *Sol Invictus Elagabal* from ad 220 onward must be considered a careful choice of the emperor and his advisors in order to assure both the soldiers and the civilian population that the emperor—though still quite young—was taking his role as protector of the empire seriously. Dirven has convincingly argued that the sacrificial scene on the obverse of the coins promoting the god Elagabal shows the emperor not in Syrian priestly dress but in the typical dress of the Roman emperor and chief commander in peace time (fig. 21.3) (Dirven 2007; cf. McHugh 2017 on the use of long-sleeved tunics and trousers since the Marcomannic Wars). That the god Elagabal is picked up as a motif on provincial coinage and in dedicatory inscriptions throughout the empire must be seen as an indicator of the success of this propaganda strategy. As corroboration, nineteen emperors of the third century associated themselves with a sun god on their coins (Manders 2012, 126–131).

FIGURE 21.3. Denarius of Elagabal from ca. 218–222, depicting on the obverse the bust of Elagabal with a laurel wreath and the legend IMP(erator) ANTONINUS PIUS AUG(ustus), on the reverse the legend P(ontifex) M(aximus) TR(ibunicia) P(otestas) V CO(n)S(ul) IIII P(ater) P(atria) around Elagabal standing facing left, holding a cypress branch and sacrificing over a small altar. Image courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, LLC.

In ad 220, the emperor married Iulia Cornelia Paula, daughter of the jurist Iulius Paulus, but divorced her after half a year to marry Iulia Aquilia Severa, at the time a Vestal Virgin. This marriage was a dramatic break with Roman tradition as the chastity of the Vestal Virgins was considered to be the safeguard of the Roman people and Vestals found to have been unchaste were regularly executed to appease the gods. The marriage may have been celebrated as a "holy union" between the highest male and female priests of the empire and was accompanied by another holy union between the god Elagabal and the goddess Urania. This must have been an attempt to further the divine aspect of imperial rule that had already been pushed by his predecessors e.g., by promoting the imperial family as a *domus divina* (e.g., *CIL* VIII, 12006). The marriage again was short-lived and in the summer of ad 221, the emperor married his third wife Annia Aurelia Faustina, a relative of Marcus Aurelius, whom he divorced again at the end of ad 221 to remarry Iulia Aquilia Severa. In summer ad 221 the emperor had also adopted his younger cousin Bassianus Alexianus and made him his Caesar and heir, but already in March ad 222, the emperor had tried to get rid of him again, leading to a revolt of the praetorians in which the emperor, his mother, and several of their supporters—among them the praetorian prefect—were killed (Cass. Dio 79.20.1–21.1; Hdn. 5.8.3–10). The swiftness of the succession of his cousin and Caesar, the survival of the grandmother Iulia Maesa, and the ostentatious violence of the murders committed by a select group of praetorians—with the bodies dragged through town and thrown into the Tiber—show that this was not the result of widespread disaffection but the final chapter in a power struggle within the *domus divina*. This power struggle was probably also the cause of the chaotic marriage arrangements and the adoption of Bassianus Alexianus with the faction sponsoring him finally coming out on top. The winning side immediately started spinning their questionable actions as an act of liberation of the Roman Empire from an "oriental tyrant." It is this narrative that the sources happily picked up (Kemezis 2014).

Bassianus Alexianus, as emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander, was the son of Iulia Mamaea, the daughter of Iulia Domna's sister Iulia Maesa, and Gessius Marcianus, an equestrian from Arca/Caesarea ad Libanum in the Lebanon Mountains (Cass. Dio 79.30.3). His Syrian heritage plays very little part in the sources other than a report of the *Historia Augusta* that he was born in a temple of Alexander the Great at Arca (SHA, *Alex. Sev*. 5.1)—no doubt a means of foreshadowing his military campaigns that this text describes very favorably—and a short note in Herodian that Severus Alexander, too, was involved in the family priesthood of Emesa (Hdn. 5.3.3). That his Syrian family background is so effectively effaced in the sources supports the interpretation that his predecessor was deliberately cast as an "oriental tyrant" by Alexander's propaganda in order to justify the regime change. To maximize this strategy, the stone of Elagabal was sent back to Emesa and the *Elagabalium* was quickly rededicated to *Iupiter Ultor* to signal the return to traditional Roman values. When Alexander was acclaimed as emperor by the praetorian guard and quickly acknowledged by the senate, he was around thirteen years old. Immediately a *consilium* of advisors was established for him consisting of eminent members of the senate. He was presented as a well-educated but sheltered young man due to the excellent care that his grandmother and mother had given him to protect him from the "depravity" of his cousin (Hdn. 6.1.2). Thus, Alexander's youth was acknowledged and turned into a strength as he would be making his decisions with the best advice at hand. This measure could also strengthen support for the new emperor in the senate, as senators could feel that their importance for the Roman state was once again established. Alexander's rule was also promoted as a return to law and order with the emperor surrounded by famous jurists as part of his advisory team and taking a personal interest in legal matters. This image was also projected by administrative measures such as an improvement to the grain dole in Rome and a building program including a new aqueduct, emphasizing the care of the emperor for his people. Alexander, too, gave his grandmother and mother a prominent position in his propaganda, again visible on the coinage, which was meant to promote both the continuity of the dynasty and the ideal of a strong imperial family (Rowan 2011).

But while Herodian and the biography in the *Historia Augusta* paint a picture of an efficient and peaceful running of the empire, all was not well (McHugh 2017). Even though the praetorians had been instrumental in establishing Alexander as emperor, they evidently did not fully support his rule, as the famous jurist Ulpian, who Alexander's team had appointed as praetorian prefect, was killed by them in front of the emperor and his mother. Cassius Dio, who was consul together with the emperor in ad 229, was forced to leave Rome lest he be killed, too. Several usurpations and revolts show how precarious the situation was, and it was made worse—again—by a botched marriage: in ad 225 the emperor was married to Sallustia Barbia Orbiana. Very little is known of her family background and in particular of her father, even though he supposedly tried to usurp the throne in ad 227 with the help of the praetorians and was killed, his daughter Sallustia Orbiana then exiled to Africa (SHA, *Alex. Sev*. 49.3f.). Herodian depicts this as a conflict between an overbearing mother Iulia Mamaea and a father-in-law intent on protecting the young emperor (Hdn. 6.1.9f.), but either way the conflicts between different factions of the *domus divina* and their supporters that had already spelled the end for Alexander's predecessor had evidently not been resolved.

The major challenges for Alexander's reign, however, came from the outside: east of the Roman border, Arsakid rule of the Parthian Empire had ended in ad 224 with the successful usurpation of a local nobleman. This usurper, Ardashir I, established his rule over the former Parthian Empire by promoting himself as a supreme military commander, and this also entailed

a much more aggressive policy toward his western neighbors (see Chen, chapter 10, this volume). Ardashir led several campaigns to Roman Mesopotamia so that Severus Alexander was forced to mount a counterattack in ad 231. The Parthians had become rather comfortable neighbor: they had not set foot on Roman territory since the age of Augustus but could be stylized as great enemies whenever a Roman emperor needed a military campaign in the East. Under Ardashir and his successors, the situation was quite different and required considerably more military engagement from the Romans. Severus Alexander was the first to experience this. His counter-campaign in ad 232 was conducted in three columns, but the geographical details in the sources are unclear: one army traveled northeast via Armenia and attacked Ardashir from the north. It encountered Ardashir's troops in Media and managed to make some advances. A second body of Alexander's army had been sent south and was to attack Ardashir at the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris. It caused some damage, too, before Ardashir hastily pulled his troops from the north to counter the attack. The third and largest army traveled with the emperor through the Syrian Desert, possibly via Palmyra, and was to unite with the other two armies. But it failed to advance as planned so that the army sent to the southeast was wiped out. The northern army was ordered to retreat through Armenia, but experienced losses. The middle army with the emperor returned to Syria and the troops were able to regroup at Antioch. The result was not a complete disaster as it pushed Ardashir back to the frontiers established by Septimius Severus, and Ardashir's army had been weakened enough to guarantee peace at least for the time being (Edwell 2008). However, it is possible that the soldiers felt unhappy with the campaign and its logistical challenges. Also, they may have felt unsure of their emperor who had been in command of the largest of the three armies and had failed to advance as planned. This situation could have been saved by a second campaign, but on returning to Antioch, Alexander was informed about attacks by Germanic tribes to the Rhine frontier. Alexander, his mother, and his troops traveled to the Rhine and set up camp in Mainz in autumn of ad 234. Alexander and his advisors seem to have favored a diplomatic solution including Roman payments, but this was harshly criticized by the troops. Alexander had not managed to gain much credit as a military leader in the East and would now have required a victory to prove his valor. Opting for diplomacy must have appeared like treason to the troops from the East, who had been deployed from what could have been a successful campaign with more booty in Mesopotamia, and the troops from the West, who saw their own opportunity to achieve glory and booty taken away from them. In spring ad 235, the army at Mainz revolted and killed Severus Alexander and his mother, acclaiming C. Iulius Verus Maximinus (known today as Maximinus Thrax), an equestrian military career officer, as their new emperor. Maximinus had already fought with Alexander's troops in Mesopotamia and must have been well known and respected enough by the troops to be chosen at this time (Huttner 2008). He immediately proved his leadership by conducting campaigns deep into Germanic territories—no doubt exactly what the army had expected from Severus Alexander and he had failed to give.

A Near Eastern Empire?

The Severan dynasty profoundly transformed many parts of the Roman Empire, but in particular the Roman Near East. This was not, however, due to a specific personal interest that Iulia Domna or her family members pursued, but a consequence of political necessities and a need to garner support for each of the Severan rulers. Thus, the most transformative measures —the granting of colonial status to cities in the Near East begun by Septimius Severus and the

constitutio Antoniniana of Caracalla—were taken to ensure support for Severus and Caracalla in critical moments of their rule with the long-term integrative effect of these measures on the civic communities of the Roman Near East as a by-product only.

But in hindsight, these measures would also enable the so-called Crisis of the Third Century with the quick succession of emperors mostly appointed from the ranks of the military and constant external threats on the eastern and northern frontiers. The Parthian Wars of Septimius Severus and Caracalla surely played a part in the weakening of the Parthian monarchy that led to its destruction at the hands of the far more aggressive Ardashir I and his successors (McHugh 2017). But much more dramatic were the consequences of Severan rule for the internal development of the Roman Empire: while Severan administrative measures strengthened the bond of civic communities with the imperial core in Rome, this core itself experienced increasing turmoil. Already under Septimius Severus, the conflict with Plautianus and Caracalla showed dissent within the ruling circle and this would continue in particular under Elagabal and Severus Alexander. These conflicts always involved the senatorial elite and took an almost regular death toll there, which increased the importance of equestrian officers both in the administration and the military as the men who meanwhile got the work of running the empire done (Mennen 2011). In particular in the military, this coincided with two other Severan developments: Septimius Severus had deliberately used a strategy of constant financial benefits and ample opportunity for glory and booty for the army. But while this made sense from the point of view of a dynasty brought into power by a military usurpation, it also meant that the soldiers were constantly reminded of their power. When Caracalla's *constitutio Antoniniana* had granted citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire in order to cover up Caracalla's fratricide, this also meant the end of auxiliary recruitment by geographical area and the entry of these men into regular legions. From now on, the geographical "home" of the soldiers no longer served as a framework for personal identity. This must have given the army as an institution a much more important ideological position for its soldiers as a guarantor of such a framework for personal identity, than it had had before. The combination of increasingly visible power, new emphasis on the army as identity giver, and increasing importance of equestrian career officers in the defense of a threatened frontier would open the way for men like Macrinus and Maximianus Thrax and their successors as soldier emperors of the third century.

In all of this, the Near East found itself in a key position—but by pure geographic accident. It was not any influence that the Syrian family of Iulia Domna wielded over the men of the Severan dynasty, but the necessities of a frontier situation of the Near East with first the Parthian and then the Sasanian Empire that required frequent imperial attention and action in the East. This, in turn, would make the Near East one of the most important military arenas of the third century, ultimately enabling new Roman leaders from the East such as the emperor Philippus Arabs from Shabba in Arabia, who ruled from AD 244 to 249, or Odaenathus of Palmyra and later his widow Zenobia (on Palmyra see Bobou, chapter 35, this volume), who profited not only from their own military leadership qualities but also from the integrative transformation the policies of the Severan dynasty had had on the Near East. Thus, the Severans did not create a Near Eastern Roman Empire, but they did create a far more Roman Near East than ever before.

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CHAPTER 22

THE PARTHIANS

An Empire on the Rise

PETER EDWELL

Introduction

The historical significance of the rise and development of the Parthian Empire has often been overshadowed by that of its predecessors, successors, and neighbors. Emerging from obscurity on the shores of the Caspian Sea in the third century BC to control the complex lands of Iran and Mesopotamia, parts of central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Syria by the end of the second century BC, the Parthians established an empire of considerable significance to the history of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. The nature of Parthian Arsacid imperial control over these territories has been the subject of an increasing volume of scholarship in recent years and what was once seen as an empire run by "the political clowns of the millennium" is now seen as a sophisticated balance of autonomy and centralized control, which allowed the Parthian Empire to survive and flourish for five hundred years (Keall 1994; Gregoratti 2018).

It is an unfortunate reality that the political history of the Parthian Empire is known to us mostly via references in surviving authors of the late Hellenistic and Roman periods with little coming from the Parthians themselves. In 1938, Nelson Debevoise observed that for much of the period prior to the Parthian invasion of Mesopotamia in the late 140s bc, Parthian history was consigned in most modern analyses to the stuff of legend (Debevoise 1938, xxvi–xxvii). Work has been done in more recent years to challenge this assumption (for example Overtoom 2020) but limitations will likely remain. References in Roman sources are considerably more abundant from the early years of the first century bc but are beset by the obvious biases produced by ongoing enmity between Parthia and Rome. Chinese annals potentially provide a more complete picture of events on Parthia's central Asian frontier during this period (see Ellerbrock 2021, 4–8 on literary sources). Thankfully, increased focus on archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics has been undertaken in recent decades, which sheds more light on the vibrant culture, administration, and economy of the Parthian Empire (see, for example, Curtis and Stewart 2007; Hauser 2012 and Ellerbrock 2021, 71–102).

Three phases of Parthian history are typically identified in modern scholarship (Hauser 2012, 1003; 2013, 278; Overtoom 2020; Ellerbrock 2021 prefers four phases) and it is the second, or middle phase running approximately from the middle of the second century bc to the middle of the first century ad, which is analyzed here given the focus on empire and imperial rivalry in this chapter. It was in the second half of the second century bc that the Parthian Arsacid dynasty could truly say that it had founded an empire, one that stood in comparison with that of the Achaemenid Persians or its eventual Roman rivals despite significant structural differences (see Strootman 2018, 131). The shift from regional power in northern Iran to a more Mesopotamia-based empire came mostly at the expense of a disintegrating Seleucid empire following the death of Antiochus IV (164 bc). With Media, Elymais, and Mesene all attempting to assert independence of the Seleucids in the wake of Antiochus's death, the Arsacid Parthian ruler Mithradates I (165–132 bc) took advantage of this significant instability.

Mithradates I and an Arsacid Parthian Empire

Described by Bivar (1983, 33) as "the real founder of Parthia as a major power," Mithradates invaded and conquered Media and its capital of Ecbatana in 148/147 BC. In 141 BC he captured Babylonia—the acquisition of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris being one of the most significant outcomes. The city's importance to the Parthians was indicated soon after with the crowning of Mithradates as king at Seleucia while Ctesiphon was newly established on the opposite bank of the river. Seleucia-Ctesiphon, with an increasing focus on Ctesiphon as the centuries unfolded, would become the most important city in the Parthian Empire, essentially functioning as a capital (see Schippmann 1986). Mithradates took control of Elymais, a regional kingdom in southern Iraq and western Iran, in 139 BC with the city of Susa captured in the process. The Xong-e Noruzi relief shown in Figure 22.1 is a likely depiction of Mithradates' triumphant arrival in Elymais. In the middle of the following year the forces of Mithradates captured the Seleucid king, Demetrius II, during a failed attempt by the king to recover Babylonia (1 Maccabees 14.1–3). Mithradates took the title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ (great king) according to his coins (Sellwood types 10i, 11, 12i–iii, 12vii, 13ii) in probable emulation of the Achaemenid kings.

FIGURE 22.1. The Xong-e Noruzi relief possibly depicting Mithradates I as conqueror of Elymais (Creative Commons Licence Number CC BY-SA 3.0).

The extent to which Mithradates had been able to challenge the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom to the east is the subject of ongoing debate. A reference by the Roman geographer Strabo (*Geog*. 16.744) to Parthian power extending to the Hydaspes is taken by some to mean that Mithradates had expanded Parthian imperial control to northern India by the time of his death in 132 BC, although Bivar (1983, 35) preferred to interpret this reference as the Hydaspes in Media.

Under Mithradates's immediate successor, Phraates II (132–127 BC), some considerable challenges confronted the Parthians (Ellerbrock 2021, 32–33). The most significant of these came on the central Asian frontier from a tribal group known as the Sacaraucae (part of the larger tribal group often referred to in ancient sources as the Scythians), who had been displaced by events farther to their east. The Sacaraucae would continue to represent a challenge to the Parthians for much of the next two decades and continued to do so into the first century BC.

In the west, the Seleucid king, Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BC), set out to remove the Parthians from Babylonia and Media and scored some impressive victories towards the end of the 130s (see Overtoom 2020, 189–190). Phraates's defeat of a large Seleucid army under Antiochus's leadership in Media early in 129 BC was a major victory for the Parthians (Justin, 38.10.2ff.), especially due to the number of Seleucid soldiers reported slain together with the captivity of Antiochus's son, Seleucus. The following year, an offensive of the Sacaraucae in the east saw Parthian forces eventually overwhelmed and Phraates himself killed (Justin 42.2.1). A similar fate would meet his short-lived successor Artabanus who was wounded in battle in 124 BC and died soon after. Artabanus's brief reign also saw the emergence of Hyspaosines as ruler of the Persian Gulf kingdom of Characene, who briefly challenged Parthian power in Babylonia. Characene would become something of a model for how Parthian kings ruled through client-king relationships, preferring an approach of decentralization and local autonomy with occasional periods of direct occupation when the required deference to the Parthian king appeared to be lacking (Gregoratti 2018, 61).

The Reign of Mithradates II

It was the long reign of Mithradates II (124/123–87 BC) that saw the establishment of "unrivalled Parthian hegemony over the entire Hellenistic Middle East" (Overtoom 2020, 246). Mithradates not only extended Parthian power to the south and west of Iran and Mesopotamia but was also responsible for the more secure establishment of the central Asian frontier. In the last years of Mithradates's reign, however, significant challenges emerged, which caused serious problems for Parthian imperial power through most of the first half of the first century BC.

Soon after coming to power, Mithradates moved against Hyspaosines of Characene and occupied the Persian Gulf kingdom in 122/121 BC (Bivar 1983, 40). Not long afterward, Mithradates also moved against Armenia, at which time Tigranes, who would later carve out a significant regional empire, was taken captive and held as a hostage while the rulers of Adiabene and Corduene in northern Mesopotamia also accepted Arsacid Parthian power (Dąbrowa 2021, 44). In the east, Mithradates established a firmer presence in modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of northern India following a successful settlement of the upheaval that had marked Parthian engagement with the Sacaraucae over most of the decade before he came to power (Bivar 1983, 41).

The extent to which the Parthian Empire had emerged as a significant presence in southwest and central Asia during the reign of Mithradates II is reflected in a Chinese embassy in 115 BC, which sparked a period of "intense diplomatic activity" between the Chinese and Parthian courts (Pulleyblank 1991/2011). Only a few years later (ca. 109 BC), Mithradates adopted the title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ "great king of kings" on his coinage (Sellwood types 24i, 27i, 28 – see Figure 22.2 below). Much has been made of his adoption of this title and what it reflected of the imperial claims and ideology of Mithradates and his successors. Was it a conscious emulation of the Achaemenids, who had also used the title, or was it more in response to concerns about the actions of his brother Sinatruces who was perhaps emerging as a dynastic threat as early as this time (see Hekster and Fowler 2005, 142–143)?

FIGURE 22.2. Silver drachm of Mithradates II. Rhagai Mint. Struck ca. 96–92 **BC**. Sellwood 28i. Reverse inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ (courtesy Classical Numismatic Group).

First Meeting with the Romans

It was the latter part of Mithradates II's reign that saw the first direct engagement between Parthia and the Romans. Competition between the Parthian and Roman Empires would have profound effects on the expansionary activities of both empires, and there were prolonged periods in which each empire attempted involvement in the internal politics of the other. In either 96 or 95 BC (the date of 92 BC is now generally discounted) a Parthian envoy, Orobazes, met with the Roman general Sulla and Ariobarzanes, the Roman nominee to the throne of Cappadocia (Plut., *Sull*. 5.3–4; Schlude 2020, 24–29; Keaveney 1981). Sulla had gone to Cappadocia to support the elevation of the pro-Roman Ariobarzanes as a counterweight to concerns over the expansionary activities of Mithradates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia. According to a number of Roman sources (Plut., *Sull*. 5.7–8; Liv., *Epit*. 70; Fest., *Brev*. 15), Orobazes requested *amicitia*, a formal recognition of friendship, between Parthia and Rome but was later put to death on the orders of Mithradates II for appearing subordinate and too deferential to Sulla.

Whether a *foedus* was established between Parthia and Rome under Mithradates and Sulla, either as a result of the meeting or at some stage afterward, hinges on a later reference by

Florus (1.46.4–5) who claimed that the Parthian king Orodes II (57–37 bc) sent envoys to Crassus in 53 bc in the lead up to Carrhae, reminding him of the *foedi* struck earlier between Rome and Parthia under Sulla and Pompey (Keaveney 1981, 197 and Schlude 2020, 26 hold that there was a formal alliance under Sulla whereas Sherwin-White 1984, 119–120 thought that arrangements between the Parthians and Sulla [and later Lucullus] were informal only).

Sinatruces and Instability in Arsacid Parthian Rulership

Following the Euphrates meeting between Orobazes and Sulla there is no evidence for any direct engagement between Parthia and Rome for approximately thirty years. For the Parthians, internal discord was already a significant problem in the latter years of Mithradates's reign and this escalated following his death in 87 BC. The most pressing issue occupied the Parthians on their central Asian frontier and came in the figure of Sinatruces, who had emerged at the head of the Sacaraucae tribal group and was making claims to the kingship of the Parthian Empire. We have already briefly seen that the Sacaraucae emerged as a problem for the Parthians during the reign of Phraates II (132–127 BC) who died in battle with them (Justin 42.2.1). His brother and successor Artabanus I would meet the same fate a few years later (Justin 42.2.2) but Mithradates II had at least initially come to a peaceful settlement with them.

Sinatruces was a brother of Phraates II and Artabanus I and in the latter years of the long reign of his nephew, Mithradates II, emerged as a serious imperial contender (Ellerbrock 2021, 36). He had either been captured by the Sacaraucae during the battles of the late 120s or had fled to them during a purge of rival imperial family members on the succession of Mithradates II. By the last years of Mithradates's reign, Sinatruces was approaching the age of seventy and was an ongoing problem for his nephew during much of the latter half of his reign.

Tigranes of Armenia and Mithradates VI of Pontus

When difficulties emerged for the Parthians with Tigranes of Armenia in the late 90s, Sinatruces had the opportunity to advance his cause and finally make a serious bid for the Parthian throne. His imperial lineage and the support he enjoyed from the Sacaraucae sparked a serious and sustained division in Arsacid Parthian imperial rulership for most of the next four decades. Eventually, the imperial line descending from Sinatruces would succeed after a series of civil wars and intra-dynastic murders. His grandson, Orodes II, would finally bring the long period of instability in Parthian leadership to an end, marked by the elimination of his brother Mithradates IV in 54 BC.

The latter years of Mithradates II's reign had seen problems emerge in Armenia and this would eventually become a major issue for the Parthians over the following decades. Tigranes of Armenia, who had been a hostage at the Parthian court since the defeat of his father by Mithradates in 105 bc, had traded a substantial portion of the eastern part of the kingdom (the so-called Seventy Valleys) on his father's death in 95 bc in exchange for his repatriation from the Parthian court in order to succeed to the throne (Str., *Geog*. 11.14.15; Ellerbrock 2021, 34).

With an escalation in the activities of Sinatruces following Mithradates's death in 87 bc, Tigranes took advantage of these problems and set about recovering the territories he had ceded to Parthia in 95 bc. Tigranes went further than this and initially occupied northern Mesopotamia together with Atropatene and eventually the rest of Mesopotamia (Str., *Geog*. 11.14.16). In 83 bc, Tigranes sidelined the Seleucid king and ruled Syria via a governor based in

Antioch. With some other military successes in the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus, Tigranes carved out a substantial regional empire, which was particularly problematic for the Parthians but would also cause concern for the Romans (Chaumont 1986/2011).

The concerns for both the Parthians and the Romans in relation to Tigranes became more pronounced when he and Mithradates VI of Pontus formed an alliance. During Mithradates's first war with the Romans (88–84 bc), Tigranes provided a relatively low level of support for the Pontic king but in 69 bc, during what would become known as the Third Mithradatic War, Mithradates fled to Armenia after his defeat at the hands of the Roman general Lucullus. The two kings established a formal alliance, cemented by the marriage of Tigranes to the daughter of Mithradates. This was clearly an ominous development for both Parthia and Rome because Tigranes's strength at this time was considerable (see Mayor 2009).

Dealings with Lucullus and Pompey

The internal problems that plagued the Parthian Empire during the first half of the first century BC were known to the Romans, but they focused on Mithradates VI of Pontus and Tigranes during this period. According to Plutarch (*Luc.* 36.6), "the Parthian power was not so great as it proved to be (later) in the time of Crassus, nor was it so well united, rather, owing to intestine and neighbouring wars, it had not even strength enough to repel the wanton attacks of the Armenians." Lucullus, initially as consul in 74 BC and then as governor of Cilicia and Asia, led the Roman effort to deal with the expansionary activity of Mithradates and once the alliance with Tigranes had been established, Lucullus was also dealing with the Armenians.

In 68 bc Lucullus sent an envoy to the Parthian king, Phraates III (70–57 bc), requesting that the Parthians remain neutral while Roman military activity was under way to subdue both Mithradates and Tigranes (Plut., *Luc*. 30; App., *Mith*. 87; Cass. Dio 36.3). This likely suited Phraates given the ongoing problems with rival imperial claimants. The fact that the Romans were expending considerable resources dealing with Mithradates and Tigranes was also advantageous to the Parthians. Indeed, the alliance between Mithradates and Tigranes may well have been viewed by the Parthians as a positive development because it now made Tigranes a sworn enemy of Rome.

The treacherous nature of Roman politics at the time saw Pompey successfully maneuver Lucullus out of the command of the Mithradatic War and Pompey soon struck an alliance with Phraates III in 66 bc, which was aimed primarily at isolating Tigranes (Cass. Dio 36.45.3). This arrangement was updated in a revised agreement in 64 bc, (Plut., *Pomp*. 33.6; App., *Mith*. 104), which was eventually approved by the Roman senate in 59 bc (see Plin., *Ep*. 10.78.1; 112.1).

Part of the negotiation of this agreement was a request from Phraates that the Euphrates River be recognized as a boundary between Parthia and Rome (see Edwell 2013). The request was made principally because one of Pompey's legates, Aulus Gabinius, had led a raid into northern Mesopotamia in 65 bc and this had caused concern for the Parthians (Str., *Geog*. 12.3.34; App., *Syr*. 51.2.57). Famously, Phraates was informed by Pompey, with what is often suggested to be a degree of arrogance, that a just boundary would be adopted (Plut., *Pomp*. 33.6; Cass. Dio 37.5.5). It is important, however, to bear in mind that Pompey was strongly focused on Mithradates and Tigranes and it was prudent not to strike an agreement with the Parthians that was too definitive given the complex military and political situation. He would also have been mindful of the complexities of Roman politics, which in theory left matters related to foreign policy to the senate. It is also likely that the Parthians were beginning to

focus on what the geopolitical situation might look like after the Romans had dealt with Mithradates and Tigranes.

Some of the details of Pompey's spectacular two-day triumph held in Rome in 62 bc are indicative of the extent to which Tigranes and Mithradates were seen from a Roman perspective as a far more significant enemy and threat than the Parthians at the time. In his account of Pompey's triumph and summary of Pompey's achievements, Appian emphasized the length of the Mithradatic and Tigranian Wars—i.e., they lasted for forty-two years (App., *Mith*. 118). "In the same war that part of Cilicia which was not yet subject to them (the Romans), together with the Syrian countries, Phoenicia, Coele-Syria, Palestine and the country inland as far as the Euphrates, although they did not belong to Mithradates, were gained by impetus of the victory over him and were required to pay tribute, some immediately and others later." In broad summation Appian continued at 119; "Such and so diversified was this one war; but in the end it brought the greatest gains to the Romans, for it pushed the boundaries of their dominion from the setting of the sun to the river Euphrates."

Tigranes's removal as a problem for the Parthians on their northwestern frontier was one less difficulty the Parthian leadership was required to deal with. The dynastic divisions, which had plagued the Parthian leadership since the mid-90s, were also finally dealt with soon after Orodes II came to power in 57 bc. The episode would demonstrate, however, Rome's preparedness to foster instability in the Parthian leadership.

Installing his brother, Mithradates, on the throne of Media on coming to power, Orodes turned on him soon after and Mithradates fled to Aulus Gabinius the governor of Syria. Gabinius initially supported Mithradates in a return to Parthia where he was successful in taking control of Babylonia. Orodes would succeed, however, in defeating Mithradates, and in 54 bc had his brother executed. This finally brought the internal difficulties in Parthia to an end and in the following year, with the dramatic defeat of Crassus at Carrhae, the Romans would quickly come to understand just how significant an imperial challenge a more united Parthian Empire represented (see Ellerbrock 2021, 40–43).

The Impact of Carrhae

The confidence of the Parthians in the wake of Carrhae clearly grew and Rome began to take the Parthians more seriously. Cassius Dio claimed that the defeat of Crassus in 53 BC marked the beginning of Rome's war with the Parthians, and a selection of Cicero's letters, which are contemporary with the events, suggest that the Romans viewed war with Parthia from this time as continuous. Writing from Cilicia (*Att.* 5.18) where he was governor in September, 51 BC, Cicero expressed concern about an imminent Parthian attack, and writing to Cato four months later Cicero reported, with a degree of alarm, an expected Parthian attack on Antioch (14.4).

An important feature of the imperial rivalry between the two powers from this time was interference and involvement in each other's political and dynastic difficulties. The Romans had already attempted this with Orodes and his brother Mithradates before Carrhae. Pompey sought to enlist Parthian aid against Julius Caesar in the lead up to the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 bc (Cass. Dio 41.55.3–4, 42.2.5; Caes., *B Civ*. 3.82–84; 88–96) and Dio (42.2.5) suggested that Pompey contemplated fleeing to the court of Orodes following his defeat at Pharsalus.

The ongoing nature of the war between Rome and Parthia was further indicated by the advanced plans of Julius Caesar to lead a campaign against the Parthians at the very time of his assassination (App., *B Civ*. 2.110). The Parthians provided support to the main conspirators,

Brutus and Cassius, whose armies at the Battle of Philippi in 42 bc included Parthian troops (App., *B Civ*. 4.59, 63, 88; Cass. Dio 47.30.3).

Further reflective of ongoing Parthian involvement in the civil wars of the Romans during this period, Quintus Labienus, who had been sent as an envoy by Cassius to the Parthians, joined forces with Orodes after the defeat of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi (Cass. Dio 48.24.3–27; Plut., *Ant*. 28.1; Edwell 2021, 30–31). A Parthian invasion of Roman Syria in 40 bc was led by Labienus and the heir to the Parthian throne, Pacorus, when they crossed the Euphrates with a large army and attacked the city of Apamea. This attack failed but Labienus rallied some of the local garrisons to the Parthian cause and this combined army defeated the governor of Syria, L. Decidius Saxa, whom Antony had installed. Pacorus then conquered much of the east Mediterranean coastline and hinterland while Labienus pursued Saxa, who he defeated and killed in Cilicia. In 39 bc a Roman counterattack under P. Ventidius Bassus in Asia Minor defeated Labienus, who was subsequently captured and executed while Pacorus was killed the following year in Syria (Cass. Dio 48.41, 49.19.2–3; Str., *Geog*. 16.2.8; Frontin., *Str*. 1.1.6).

In 36 bc Mark Antony marched into Atropatene with 113,000 men, and this invasion resulted in a resounding Parthian victory with thousands of Roman and auxiliary soldiers dying during the retreat due to the cold winter (Plut., *Ant*. 37). Antony's losses marked almost twenty years of Parthian success in blunting Roman imperial ambitions. During the final years of Rome's civil wars between Octavian and Mark Antony, regional kingdoms and principalities situated on the upper Euphrates River supported Antony and received assistance from the Parthians in doing so (Vergil, *Georg*. 1.509; 4.561).

The Role and Importance of Armenia

An important factor in the stability or otherwise of the Parthian Empire from the first century BC onward was ongoing rivalry with Rome over the kingdom of Armenia. Armenia had traditionally looked more to the Iranian world culturally, and the kingdom was essentially a Parthian client from the reign of Mithradates II; with Pompey's successful subjugation of Tigranes, however, Roman political influence in Armenia became a significant factor in the kingdom.

With Tigranes's death in 55 bc, a decade of loyalty to Rome after the old man's agreement with Pompey in 65 bc was less certain, and his son and heir Artavazdes demonstrated that he was either unable or unwilling to provide assistance to Crassus in 53 bc, mostly because the Parthian king Orodes II had occupied the kingdom (Plut., *Crass*. 22.2). In fact, Artavazdes's sister was married to Orodes's eldest son Pacorus soon after, and both kings were present at the famous performance of Euripides's *Bacchae* at the Armenian capital, Artaxata, when Crassus's head was gruesomely employed as a stage prop.

In the longer term, however, Artavazdes managed to establish a degree of independence of the two powers and this became a feature of the relationship between Rome and Parthia over Armenia in the following centuries. The geography and political complexity of Armenia meant that either Parthia or Rome needed to invest considerable resources in maintaining a military presence in the kingdom, and this was not always possible. Armenia was successful at times in playing both powers off against each other.

The primary focus was on civil conflict within the Roman Empire from ca. 50–30 bc, and with Parthian imperial attempts to take advantage of this, rivalry between Parthia and Rome in Armenia does not appear to have been a significant issue until 36 bc when Artavazdes supplied troops for Mark Antony's Parthian campaign. Their quick withdrawal, however, after Antony's unsuccessful siege of Phraaspa, drew Antony's enduring anger and resulted in Artavazdes's

capture and eventual execution in Egypt in 34 bc (Plutarch, *Ant*. 39; Cass. Dio 49.25.4). For much of the following decade a tussle ensued between Rome and Parthia for domination of Armenia.

Phraates IV and Rome

In 33 BC, Phraates IV (37–2 BC), who had come to power after his father Orodes's death in 37 BC, faced a rebellion by an individual named Tiridates, and Octavian sought to take advantage of this instability following his defeat of Antony at Actium in 31 BC. The rebellion of Tiridates had continued at a relatively low level, but both Phraates and Tiridates sent envoys to Octavian in the wake of his victory at Actium (Justin 42.5–6; Cass. Dio 51.20). The following year, Tiridates succeeded in seizing power and Phraates fled to the Scythians (Bivar 1983, 65). Phraates later emerged victorious over Tiridates who fled to the Romans in Syria in May 27 BC (Sellwood 1995, 72).

Importantly, and for reasons not immediately obvious, Tiridates brought one of Phraates IV's sons with him, also known as Phraates, as a hostage. Tiridates soon made his way back into Parthian territory with Roman support, invading down the Euphrates and taking Phraates IV by surprise. He occupied Seleucia for a few months, minting coins that described him as "Philoromaios" in May, 26 bc (Sellwood 1995; the story is also given some credence by the broadly contemporary Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 1, who referred to Phraates killing his concubines on an island upstream from Anatha as Tiridates advanced quickly down the Euphrates). Justin (42.5.8) claimed that Tiridates would take the throne on behalf of Augustus if he was successful. Phraates IV eventually succeeded in gaining the upper hand and Tiridates fled to Augustus according to the *Res gestae* (32). By August 26 bc, Phraates IV was minting coins again at Seleucia (Bivar 1983, 66).

In 23 bc, Augustus agreed to return Phraates's son on the understanding that prisoners and the standards lost by Crassus at Carrhae be returned to Rome (Cass. Dio 53.33). Delayed responses from Phraates saw a Roman military build-up in Armenia, and Augustus himself came to Syria in 20 bc to put pressure on Phraates to agree to a settlement (Cass. Dio 54.7.4). With an agreement finally reached, the return of the standards in 20 bc was represented as a military victory by the Romans even though it was not (see esp. Cass. Dio 54.8.2). Coins advertising the return of the standards show a subservient Parthian kneeling and presenting a standard in supplication (RIC I.287). Augustus's *Res gestae* (29) claimed that the Parthians were compelled to return the standards, and the Augustan poets, Horace and Propertius, used the return of the standards to great rhetorical effect (e.g., Hor., *Carm.* 1.12.53–54; Prop., *Elegiae* 4.6.79). While Augustus fictitiously retailed the agreement as a victory over Parthia, it was in reality a recognition that the Parthian Empire was a worthy imperial rival and that it was here to stay.

Parthia and the Julio-Claudian Dynasty of Imperial Rome

Thea Musa, a female Italian slave, was given as a gift by Augustus in partial thanks for Phraates IV's return of the standards. Musa bore the Parthian king a child, known colloquially as Phrataaces and formally as Phraates V following his father's death in 2 BC. Phraates IV had a number of other wives, and sons and grandsons by these wives were sent as hostages to Augustus as a means of guaranteeing friendship (Str., *Geog*. 16.1.28; *Res gestae* 32). Musa

may have been behind this as a means of securing the succession for Phrataaces (see Figure 22.3 for the depiction of Musa on the reverse of a coin of Phrataaces, which demonstrates her ongoing significance to his reign). The Parthian princes were prominent at Rome and treated well according to a number of accounts despite two of them dying there (*CIL* VI, 1799; *ILS* 842). Two others returned to Parthia, with one named Vonones becoming king in AD 6. The other, named Phraates, died soon after arriving in Parthia to contest the Parthian throne (see Nedergaard 1988). Whether Augustus planned it or not, the Parthian succession following Phraates IV's death was seriously affected by the presence and influence of Musa at the Parthian court and the release of the Parthian royal hostages from Rome.

FIGURE 22.3. Silver drachm of Phraataces with Musa. Ekbatana mint. Struck ca. **AD** 1–4. Diademed bust of Phraataces right; crowned bust of Musa left; Sellwood 58.9 (courtesy Classical Numismatic Group).

Problems over Armenia, however, saw Augustus dispatch his grandson Gaius in 2 BC as part of preparations for a Parthian campaign. This was in response to Phraataces expelling Augustus's nominee, Artavazdes, and placing Tigranes IV on the Armenian throne (Vell. Pat. 2.100; *Res gestae* 27; Tac., *Ann*. 2.4; Cass. Dio 55.10.18). Tigranes was clearly concerned about Gaius's arrival and formally requested Augustus's recognition of his position as the Armenian king. The situation was defused with the request accepted and Tigranes formally invested by Gaius in Syria (Cass. Dio 50.21). With the heat taken out of the situation by this compromise, a formal meeting between Gaius and Phrataaces took place on an island in the middle of the Euphrates River. Witnessed by Velleius Paterculus (2.101.1–3), the meeting was depicted as a dazzling spectacle with the two empires essentially represented as equals.

Armenia would continue to be an issue for Parthia and the empire's relationship with its Roman rival. In AD 29, Artabanus III took the Romans by surprise and successfully installed his son Arsaces on the Armenian throne and sent an embassy indicating a desire to restore the western boundaries of the Achaemenid empire (Tac., *Ann*. 6.31; Cass. Dio 59.27.2). The rhetorical aim of restoring the former Achaemenid territories would become a regular component of communication by the Sasanians centuries later (see Edwell 2021, 35).

Artabanus had developed a broader strategy of consolidating power in Armenia and blunting the previous expansion of Roman power (Tac., *Ann*. 15.2.1–3).

During the reign of Artabanus III, the Romans continued to take advantage of rivalries and intrigues within the Parthian dynasty. Rivals for the Parthian throne were clearly aware of the Roman approach and appeared in Roman territory on a regular basis seeking support. Toward the end of his reign, Tiberius took advantage of instability in Parthia, which saw Artabanus III flee to the Scythians in the face of a rebellion at Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Tac., *Ann*. 6.36; see also Bivar 1983, 73). Vitellius, then governor of Syria and future emperor, supported the return of Tiridates to the Parthian capital where he was crowned in ad 36. Tiridates's rule in Parthia was short-lived as he was unable to gain a sufficient foothold, mostly due to the perception of foreign backing, and in the following year Artabanus III was reinstated (Tac., *Ann*. 6.43).

Following Artabanus's restoration to the Parthian throne Armenia appears to have come under a form of de facto partition between Roman and Parthian interests. In ad 37 Artabanus came to terms with Rome, reflected in another symbolic meeting on a bridge in the middle of the Euphrates (Jos., *Ant. Jud.* 18.101–103; Suet., *Vit.* 2.4; see Bivar 1983, 74). The outcome of this meeting and the recognition of Artabanus by Rome, which the meeting represented, was in part a tacit recognition of Parthian power in Armenia.

Artabanus's death in ad 38 set off another round of instability in the Parthian rulership. Three brothers essentially vied for the throne, and it took most of the next decade for the second-eldest of the three, Gotarzes, to establish security in power (Tac., *Ann*. 11.9ff.; Dąbrowa 2005). In ad 48 an unofficial delegation from Parthia appeared in Rome requesting support to overthrow Gotarzes due to the excessive cruelty he had shown in consolidating power. The delegation requested that Meherdates, a grandson of Phraates IV, who was still resident in Rome, be supported to overthrow Gotarzes (Tac., *Ann*. 12.10). This venture did not end well despite Meherdates's initial enjoyment of support from Abgar, king of Edessa and the Parthian governor of Mesopotamia (Tac., *Ann*. 11.10.4; 12.10.1). According to Tacitus, the support Meherdates enjoyed was illusory and quickly turned to treachery once he was back in Parthian territory (Tac., *Ann.* 12.14). In ad 49, Meherdates was defeated in battle by Gotarzes and treated brutally in reprisal.

With the accession of Nero in ad 54, Roman attempts to cause instability in Parthian leadership came to a temporary end. The main focus was on the situation in Armenia and direct conflict between the two powers over the kingdom. In Parthia, Vologaeses I (ad 51–78) had come to power and soon set out to install his younger brother Tiridates on the Armenian throne. At that stage, Rhadamistus, a son of the Iberian king Pharasmanes, was king of Armenia. A struggle ensued that lasted for the next three years and in the same year Nero came to power, ad 54, Tiridates emerged as king of Armenia. The response to the Armenian situation under the new emperor was swift, with an invasion planned under the command of Cnaeus Domitius Corbulo.

Parthia, Nero, and Armenia

Any direct conflict between Rome and Parthia over Armenia was put on hold when Vologaeses was forced to deal with the revolt of his son, Vardanes. The revolt lasted from AD 56–58, during which time Vologaeses sent familial hostages to Nero, in part to placate the Romans in the midst of dealing with the revolt and partly to remove other potential rivals (Tac., *Ann.* 13.9; Bivar 1983, 81). Vologaeses also had to deal with problems resulting from the expansion of the Kushan Empire into eastern Iran and the subsequent revolt of the Hyrcanians (Bivar 1983, 82).

It was the latter development that gave Corbulo the upper hand as he prepared to invade Armenia and confront Tiridates. The Roman general captured and destroyed the city of Artaxata in AD 59 after which ambassadors from the Hyrcanians arrived with the aim of striking an alliance with Corbulo (Tac., *Ann.* 13.37). According to Tacitus, the ambassadors were sent on to Rome to deal directly with Nero before their return via the Red Sea and India. The following year the capital, Tigranocerta, capitulated to the forces of Corbulo. A Roman nominee, Tigranes VI, was placed on the throne and invested with full military pomp at Tigranocerta (Tac., *Ann.* 14.26.1). Tigranes soon directed damaging attacks on the kingdom of Adiabene, which was now potentially vulnerable to the Romans.

Corbulo remained in Armenia to support Tigranes VI over the following two years while Vologaeses and Tiridates made a number of attempts at recovering Armenia during this period but to no avail. They were more successful after Corbulo's withdrawal to Syria to take up the governorship of the province in ad 62 (Tac., *Ann*. 15.1.1). Corbulo's successor, Lucius Caesennius Paetus, had been given orders to take direct control of Armenia but soon found himself in difficulty. Vologaeses and Tiridates placed Paetus's troops, located at the fortress of Rhandeia, under siege and despite Corbulo's response to an appeal for help from Paetus, the Roman general capitulated (Tac., *Ann*. 15.14; Cass. Dio 62.21.2–3).

Once news of these events reached Rome—partly in the form of a letter from Vologaeses himself, which laid claim to Armenia by divine right—war was declared, with Corbulo once again placed in command (Tac., *Ann*. 15.24). The rhetoric of Corbulo's projected war swiftly dissipated, and a compromise with the Parthians was reached, which was more favorable to them than might have been expected a year earlier. The essential outcome was that Tiridates would be reinstated as king but the investiture would take place in Rome and the ceremony performed by Nero himself. At the formal conference at Rhandeia, both Vologaeses and the king of Adiabene gave hostages to Corbulo and Tiridates paid due reverence to Corbulo and an image of Nero (Cass. Dio 62.23.2).

Arrangements were made for the investiture of Tiridates in Rome by Nero who celebrated a lavish triumph in what was advertised as a great victory (Cass. Dio 63.2ff.). The events were carefully stage-managed with both Nero and Tiridates paying due respect to one another. At the formal investiture ceremony, Tiridates, addressing Nero as a god, declared that he was the descendant of Arsaces, brother of Kings Vologaeses of Parthia and Pacorus of Media and Nero's slave (Cass. Dio 63.5). In response, Nero declared Tiridates to be king of Armenia and reminded him that as emperor he had the power to both bestow kingdoms and take them away. It seems that the deference of both sides toward each other endured, with Vologaeses II (ad 77–80) sending ambassadors to Rome on the occasion of his succession and requesting Nero's memory be honored some nine years after Nero's death (Suet., *Nero* 57). The treaty of Rhandeia would serve as a benchmark for relations between Rome and Parthia over Armenia for many decades to come. While not always observed, it was often referred to as the baseline for agreements and diplomacy between the two powers.

The Structure of the Parthian Empire

The apparent instability in Arsacid Parthian imperial leadership, demonstrated over much of the period following the death of Phraates IV, was the principal basis for Keall's suggestion that the Arsacid Parthian rulers were "the political clowns of the millennium," at least at first glance (Keall 1994, 256). While this apparent instability might typically be suggestive of weakness and ineffectiveness, which the hostile Roman literary tradition would want us to believe, it is

perhaps indicative of the Arsacid Parthian embrace of autonomy and decentralization as key features of a long-term approach to imperial control and organization. De Jong (2013) emphasized the idea of a Parthian commonwealth as a better way of understanding the structure of the Parthian Empire whereby client-king relationships were preferred and direct military control of territories within the empire was only undertaken in certain circumstances and for limited periods (see especially Gregoratti 2017, 138–141 on the numerous client-king relationships with the Arsacid Parthian rulers). In some cases, such as Armenia, a close relative of the Arsacid ruler was the preferred option, which is reflective of the relative importance of a kingdom such as Armenia to the prestige of the empire.

The ongoing significance of Arsaces I as the founder of the dynasty was clearly important with each of the Parthian Arsacid kings referred to as Arsaces on their coins. The Parthian-era papyri from Dura Europos (*P. Dura* 18, 19, and 20), which date from ad 87–121, also demonstrate this, referring to the current Parthian ruler as Arsaces, rather than given names such as Vologaeses or Pacorus known to us from Roman texts, and dated in the years since the founding of the Arsacid Parthian dynasty in 247 bc. Gregoratti (2017, 135) points to the necessity of proving a blood connection to the Arsacid Parthian clan for any claimant to the throne and suggests that dynastic succession was especially tight during the third and second centuries bc when competition with the Seleucids was at an intense level.

Conclusion

From the middle of the second century BC, when Mithradates I succeeded in adding important parts of the Seleucid Empire in Iran and Mesopotamia to the domains of Arsacid Parthian control, to the years of intense rivalry with the Roman Empire from the middle of the first century BC, the Parthians established themselves as a major imperial power in Iran, Mesopotamia, and central Asia. By the time of the Treaty of Rhandeia, the Parthians had long been considered, perhaps grudgingly, as the Roman Empire's only imperial rival. Periods of dynastic instability, sometimes prolonged, allowed Roman generals and emperors, together with Scythian rulers (notably the Sacaraucae) to influence the course of events in Parthia, but the empire would continue to prevail under Arsacid Parthian rule. Parthian rulers would on a number of occasions sponsor their own claimants in leadership disputes, especially in the Roman Empire. This had significant consequences and perhaps even helped to shape the outcome of internal disputes within the Roman Empire.

In the Near East, the almost constant rivalry with Rome saw a generally accepted boundary between imperial interests adopted at the Euphrates River. There were, of course, many times in which armies and political intriguers from both sides operated well beyond this boundary, but when negotiations took place, the Euphrates was where both sides agreed to such a division of imperial interests. Armenia would continue to be a considerable source of dispute between the two powers through more than a century that passed from Carrhae to the Treaty of Rhandeia. The kingdom continued to be a source of dispute despite the treaty, and in the second century ad it was the catalyst for wars that would shape the futures of both empires. The structure of the Parthian Empire in terms more akin to a commonwealth ultimately served the Arsacids well as they sought to control a complex array of geographies and peoples.

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CHAPTER 23

THE ROMAN NEAR EAST IN THE TIME OF THE TETRARCHY AND CONSTANTINE I (AD 284–337)

VOLKER MENZE

Some destroyed an empire
But you [Constantine] the greatest—Rome!
On Roma's heroic ruins
Did you place your doctrine's throne,
In the doctrine you may sparkle–
History makes a mockery of you!

(Grillparzer, "Die Ruinen des Campo Vaccino in Rom" (1820); as in Grillparzer's notes "church" instead of the original "doctrine" ["Meinung"] is found, modern editions of the poem print "church.")

Introduction

Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872), famous for his dramatic plays and one of the most acclaimed Austrian authors, composed his neo-humanistic and anti-clerical poem on the "Ruins of Campo Vaccino in Rome" while he visited the ruins of the Colosseum in Rome in 1819, and published it after his return to Vienna. Little did he expect that his text that glorified classical Rome and set her in contrast to the post-classical Christian past would cause a major national scandal. The poem was denounced as anti-Christian and anti-Catholic, and as a result, Count Josef von Sedlnitzky, the president of the state police and censor office in Vienna, requested the publisher to cut out the text from all copies still available. The Austrian emperor Franz sent Grillparzer an official reprimand.

The "Campo Vaccino affair" was particular to the political and religious climate in the Habsburg empire of the "Biedermeier," but the negative reception of the first Christian emperor Constantine (306–337) and his rule was not exclusive to Grillparzer. Since the Italian humanists, Constantine had been accused of corrupting the church, and most famously Jacob Burkhardt (1818–1897) in his biography of Constantine from 1853 accused the emperor of opportunism in his religious policy. Unfortunately for scholars today, ancient historiography often overemphasized the religious aspect of imperial politics. Ancient authors judged not only Constantine but also the Tetrarchy according to their religious affiliation. While pagan authors praised the Tetrarchic emperors, particularly Emperor Diocletian (284–305) for his political and military decisions, Christian authors also approved Constantine's non-religious measures. From an unbiased scholarly perspective, it remains often impossible to assign certain administrative developments to either Diocletian or Constantine, and therefore—despite their adherence to different gods—their imperial politics should be regarded in union.

The period of the Tetrarchy and Constantine are one of the best-researched but also most controversially debated periods in Roman history. Timothy Barnes called it "both obviously significant and notoriously obscure" (Barnes 1982, vii). This is no contradiction as especially the times of the Tetrarchs lack (reliable) narrative sources—Lactantius's *On the Death of the*

Persecutors being the only account to offer at least a heavily prejudiced narrative—and scholars often depend on inscriptions, papyri, etc. (overview in Kuhoff 2001, 9–16 and Rees 2004, 93–196 with excerpts; for Constantine with discussion Bleckmann 2006). For the first Christian emperor, scholars are better off with Eusebius of Caesarea's *Church History* and his *Life of Constantine* but Eusebius's bias in favor of Constantine has faced harsh judgments of its historical value by historians since Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth, Jacob Burckhardt in the nineteenth, and Henri Grégoire in the twentieth centuries. Eusebius is partly to blame for that because he changed the story—or at least some important ingredients or details—from the earlier *Church History* to the later *Life of Constantine* in order to present Constantine in even better light. Scholars have analyzed Eusebius's inconsistencies and questioned his presentation of Constantine's conversion (Elliott 1987; 1996), but a majority today accepts *grosso modo* Eusebius's narratives (but see van Dam 2011).

The period between 284 and 337 continues to be studied thoroughly as it marks the watershed between the high empire/"Third-Century Crisis" and the later Roman Empire/late antiquity. The focus here is on the developments in the Near East from Arabia in the south to Armenia in the north. After an overview of the political developments, the reforms will be discussed in as much as they concern the Near Eastern provinces and the military along the border. The rise of Christianity also created the "Holy Land"—even though the term *terra sancta* only became popular in the Middle Ages.

The Tetrarchic System and the Resurrection of a Sole Emperor

Forty years ago Timothy Barnes called the time of Diocletian and Constantine the "New Empire" (Barnes 1982)—using a term coined by Edward Gibbon who considered Diocletian the founder of a new empire like Augustus (Gibbon 1906, 145). Scholars today emphasize an evolutionary development of this "new" later Roman Empire in the wake of the Tetrarchy and Constantine. After the death of Emperor Carus (283) and the murder of his oldest son Numerianus (284), the army proclaimed Diocles, a commander of the imperial bodyguards, emperor in Nicomedia on 20 November 284. Nothing indicated that the third-century pattern of substituting one military emperor with another would change anytime soon. Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, Diocles's full name as emperor, was immediately drawn into a fight against Carinus, Carus's youngest son. Soon after Carinus's death, Diocletian appointed Maximianus as junior emperor for the west, and probably less than a year later (in March or April) 286 raised him to the rank of Augustus.

Since 287, the two Augusti connected themselves with Jupiter and Hercules by adding "Iovius" and "Herculius" to their names. The Tetrarchy—a term introduced into ancient history by Otto Seeck at the end of the nineteenth century (Seeck 1897, 42)—the rule of four emperors, with two senior Augusti and two junior Caesares was established only years later in 293 (for the term Vollmer 1991). It was an "experiment," and it seems likely that Diocletian had no master plan when he came to power but responded to pressing needs (Corcoran 2000, x; Bowman 2005, 74). Maybe when Diocletian and Maximianus met in Milan in 290/291, the two decided to raise loyal and able military commanders to join them as junior emperors.

In spring 293, Flavius Constantius and Galerius Maximianus were invested as Caesares, and surprisingly the senior Constantius was designated Herculius and the younger Galerius Iovius although it worked the other way around for the Augusti. The collegiality of the four emperors was strengthened by dynastic arrangements: the Tetrarchy was an adoptive brother system (Shaw 1997, 339–340) between the two Augusti as well as the two Caesares. The Caesares

were also the *filii*, the sons of the Augusti and linked to them through marriage. Constantius married Maximianus's daughter and Galerius Diocletian's. The four emperors had their individual tasks in keeping the empire together and established residences for themselves, but no further administrative divisions were undertaken.

While Constantius reconquered Britain from the usurpers Carausius and Allectus, Galerius moved with Diocletian to Byzantium in 293. Around 295 the emperors seem to have been in the East at the dawn of renewing war with Persia that commenced in 296. Narseh (293–301), the new Persian king of kings, probably came to power through a coup d'état in 293 and launched an attack on Roman Armenia. The beginnings were not very promising for Rome as Galerius was defeated in 296 between Callinicum and Carrhae. Diocletian was not pleased with the doings of his Caesar, as Eutropius (fourth century) and much later Theophanes Confessor (ca. 760–817) report. However, in the following year the Romans took the important city of Nisibis and in 298 the Persian capital Ctesiphon. Diocletian returned from Egypt after the revolt there had been suppressed in 298 and concluded the peace treaty in Antioch in 299. The terms were favorable as the Romans advanced the border that lasted until 363 when Emperor Julian's fateful campaign caused Rome to surrender Nisibis (Millar 1993, 178–179). Diocletian seems to have stayed in Antioch in the following years while Galerius went to Thessalonica.

The two senior Augusti Diocletian and Maximianus retired in 305, and this has been considered the end of the *first* Tetrarchy, but the following Tetrarchies were less stable and rather short-lived. The new Augusti Galerius and Constantius I appointed two new Caesares in 305 (Severus in the West and Maximinus Daia in the East) but Constantius died a year later, and his troops acclaimed Constantius's son Constantine Augustus on 25 July 306 in York. Although the dynastic principle was against the Tetrarchic model, Galerius accepted Constantine as Caesar. In line with the standard epithets of the Tetrarchs, Constantine called himself "Herculius."

However, once the dynastic principle was back on the table, Maximianus's son Maxentius usurped power in Italy. He defeated Severus, whom Galerius had made Augustus after Constantius's death in 306. In 308 both Maxentius as well as his father Maximianus, who had abdicated three years earlier, declared themselves Augusti. A "conference" at Carnuntum of the most senior emperors Galerius, Diocletian, and Maximianus, in the same year attempted to reestablish the delicate power balance: Licinius (308–324) became Augustus in the West with Constantine as his Caesar; the East remained for Galerius with his Caesar Maximinus Daia (305–313). Maximianus was supposed to retire again while Maxentius was declared usurper.

This arrangement almost immediately fell apart, and in 310 the empire had a total of seven Augusti. Constantine, however, successfully overcame his opponents in the western part of the empire: he forced his father-in-law Maximianus to abdicate again in 310, and defeated Maxentius on 28 October 312 in a battle at the Milvian bridge north of Rome. Constantine established himself as sole ruler of the West and also ideologically switched from the Tetrarchic family of "Herculi" in order to claim the ancestry of Emperor Claudius Gothicus (268–270). In the East, Galerius died in 311, and war broke out between Maximinus Daia and Licinius. Licinius, who married Constantine's half-sister in 313, defeated Maximinus Daia later that year.

The Tetrarchy as imperial and ideological model had worked for a dozen years, and it stabilized the empire considerably, but it failed in the long run. Dynastic considerations and loyalties were stronger than the authority of two Augusti who elected junior Caesares. Between 313 and 324 the Roman Empire was divided, with Licinius ruling the East and Constantine the West. Both emperors made their sons co-emperors in 317 but not much is

known about the political and military history of the Near East in this period. Licinius's imperial proclamations might indicate that he fought and won a campaign against Persia (maybe 313/314; Barnes 1982, 81). The two emperors fought several wars against each other, and although later Eusebius presented these years as a religious conflict in which Constantine battled Licinius in order to defend Christianity against a tyrant, Constantine's motivation was rather a grasp for sole power. In 324 Constantine decisively defeated Licinius and took over the East, consecrating his third son, the later Emperor Constantius II (337–361), as Caesar for the East. Constantine's oldest son and likeliest successor, Crispus, was killed by Constantine together with further family members in 326 because of an intrigue.

Constantine made two lasting foundations for the later Roman as well as the Byzantine Empire. He founded a new capital, Constantinople, in 330 that would even survive the fall of Rome. The city was strategically well chosen between Europe and Asia, and clearly moved the center of the empire toward the East. The second, and even more influential innovation was Constantine's favoring of Christianity, which is not only reflected in imperial laws but also through Constantine's convocation of the first ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325. Constantine died near Nicomedia in 337 when he was about to start a campaign against Persia.

Reforms I: Reshaping the Provinces

The reigns from Diocletian and the other Tetrarchic emperors up to the death of Constantine were a period of major changes for the Roman Empire. These emperors initiated reforms because of the numerous challenges that the Roman Empire faced throughout the so-called Crisis of the Third Century. The empire had been inadequately prepared to face military challenges at different frontiers as it had neither the soldiers available nor the money to raise more troops. Although Emperor Septimius Severus (193–211) had increased the number of troops, the Roman army remained relatively small in comparison to the empire it had to defend.

The Near Eastern provinces were shaken profoundly by the humiliating Persian defeat of Emperor Valerian in 260, and the usurpation of rule by the Palmyrene queen Zenobia (267–272) in the following years. Emperor Aurelian (270–275) defeated and destroyed Palmyra, but rebuilding a defense system that had partly relied on Palmyra was not easy. Scholars have discussed whether some reforms may have already started before the Tetrarchy (Emperor Aurelian is often named in this context) but it is unlikely that major structural reforms could be implemented if an emperor did not stay in power long enough to enforce them (Corcoran 2006, 41–42). Exact dates for the structural reforms cannot be offered with any precision. Many reforms started with Diocletian and were further developed under Constantine.

The Christian author Lactantius (ca. 250–325) accused Diocletian of multiplying the imperial office, which led to a multiplication of armies because now each tetrarch needed to have an imperial army (Lactant., *De Mort. Persecut.* 7). To support this, taxes increased under which the population suffered, and according to Lactantius, peasants would leave their land in order to escape taxes. Diocletian's increase of the number of provinces and government positions is also regarded as a matter of personal greed. While Lactantius correctly noted the structural changes, he deliberately misinterpreted the cause: Diocletian certainly intended to stabilize the empire, which included a tax reform that measured the productivity of the land (*iugum*) and that of the manpower (*caput*) (Karayannopulos 1958; Jones 1964). A revision of the land taxes was undertaken every fifteen years, a cycle that was called *indictio* (which was the

general term for the imperial edict for taxes) and was to become the standard system of dating in late antiquity and beyond.

The reshaping of the empire's provinces changed the administration considerably according to the so-called "Verona List" (*Laterculus Veronensis*) which provides a list of provinces from the time. The exact date to which this overview from a seventh-century manuscript refers is debated in scholarship, and dates between 303 and 324 have been proposed (Barnes 1982, 203–205; see Kuhoff 2001, 338–370). In combination with other sources—for example, the list of bishops that attended the first ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325 or the *Notitia dignitatum*—the list offers a reliable basis. The list of provinces in the Verona List reads: "The diocese of Oriens has eighteen provinces [only seventeen are actually listed]: Libya Superior, Libya Inferior, Thebais, Aegyptus Iovia, Aegyptus Herculia, Arabia Nova, Arabia, Augusta Libanensis, Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria Coele, Augusta Euphratensis, Cilicia, Isauria, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, Osrhoene" (Rees 2004, 171). Overall, the trend was toward smaller provinces by dividing existing ones, and the *Laterculus Veronensis* mentions a total of ninety-five, the *Notitia dignitatum* even 114 provinces.

A provincial reshaping that has been debated in scholarship concerns the southern provinces of Arabia and Palestine (of which we find three provinces Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Salutaris at the end of the fourth century), including the question of what the *Laterculus Veronensis* meant by the second Arabian province. From an inscription found in a fortlet at Yotvatah in the southern Negev, the name of the province has been erased, which indicates a change of name. However, it remains unclear which province changed its name or was perhaps merged with another province (and later divided again when Constantine reorganized the East) as well as the circumstances. Scholars offered several hypotheses but especially concerning the chronology of remodeling, no consensus has been reached (Sipilä 2009; Ward 2012).

Smaller provinces also meant less power for provincial governors who lost their military commands in the time of the Tetrarchy and Constantine. The military command for a province was usually given to a *dux* of equestrian rank. The separation of military and civil commands predates the Tetrarchy but was completed only during the fourth century. This can be regarded as revolutionary, as the Roman career model so far was built on the assumption that senators held governmental together with military responsibilities. Now many crucial positions were given to men of equestrian origins although the provinces of Syria and Phoenicia remained in senatorial hands (Kuhoff 2001, 370).

With the decreased status of governors, two new layers of administration were introduced of which the *Laterculus Veronensis* mentions the twelve dioceses (the *Notitia dignitatum* later has fourteen dioceses) which were ruled by *vicarii* (Noethlichs 1982). The *vicarii* were the deputies of the new administrative top layer, the four civil praetorian prefects who were installed after 312 (Kuhoff 2001, 371–381). For the Near East, several *praefecti praetorio Orientis* are known by name as their elevated status made them noteworthy in the sources. Similarly, a good number of their deputies—who were actually not called *vicarii* but *comites Orientis* and administered the diocese Oriens—also appear in the sources after 330. Antioch on the Orontes remained the administrative and political center of the Roman Near East that it had been since Pompey's conquest of Syria in 63 BC. Diocletian even increased its importance by building an arms factory in Antioch—as he also did in Damascus and Edessa, two other strategically important cities.

Reforms II: The Army and the Frontier

The length of the Roman eastern frontier from the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the north to the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt in the south was a stretch of roughly two thousand kilometers. In contrast to the Rhine or the Danube border, there were no natural borders that could easily mark it as the eastern "frontier." As Fergus Millar remarked: "What we call the 'eastern frontier' of the Roman Empire was a thing of shadows, which reflected the diplomatic convenience of a given moment, and dictated the positioning of some soldiers and customs officials, but hardly affected the attitudes or the movements of the people on either side" (Millar 1971, 1). Complicating the military aspect further, there were "two theaters" of threats: a northern theater from the Black Sea via Anatolia and Mesopotamia to northern Syria, and a southern theater from southern Syria via Judaea and Palestine to Roman Arabia (Wheeler 2007, 236). As Everett Wheeler notes, archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the southern theater; therefore, scholars have put more focus—often unduly—here. It was, however, the northern theater that presented the stage for the confrontations between Persia and Rome: both powers undertook invasions via Mesopotamia and northern Syria—as well as Anatolia and Armenia. Galerius's defeat in 296 took place in northern Mesopotamia while the decisive Roman victory two years later was fought farther north in Armenia Minor. For centuries Rome had to defend this northern border against incursions through fortifications, deployment of troops, and the help of geographical conditions like the Euphrates and the mountainous regions of Armenia and Pontus.

The pagan author Zosimus (ca. ad 500) praised Diocletian for strengthening the border defense with cities and fortresses, which is exemplified by Ammianus Marcellinus for Circesium at the Euphrates. Ammianus Marcellinus, who served in the 350s/360s as soldier on the eastern frontier, reported that Diocletian "encircled [Circesium] with walls and lofty towers, at the time when he was arranging the inner lines of defense on the very frontiers of the barbarians, in order to prevent the Persians from overrunning Syria" (Amm. Marc. 23.5.2). For the southern frontier, Ammianus mentioned *castra* and *castella* that probably refer to the fortification of the so-called Strata Diocletiana: Diocletian initiated a fortified route leading from the Euphrates south via Palmyra and Damascus to Bostra in Roman Arabia. The Strata Diocletiana appears with this name in ancient inscriptions (partially also named after Diocletian and Maximianus) and clearly shows the strategic intentions of the emperor. It included fortresses meant to survive attacks even though the forts and fortlets could only be manned with relatively few soldiers (Lewin 2002, 93; for the architecture of the fortresses, see Johnson 1983). The Romans now needed to patrol this border themselves—a job previously done by Palmyrenians.

The sixth-century chronicler John Malalas praised Diocletian particularly for having "built fortresses on the *limes* from Egypt to the Persian borders and stationed *limitanei* in them, and he appointed *duces* for each province to be stationed further back from the fortresses with a large force to ensure the security. They put up statues to the emperor and the Caesar on the *limes* of Syria" (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 12.40). The short description of the defense indicates a two-layered system of frontier troops in the fortresses and soldiers in reserve who could be quickly moved if critical situations arose. Even though Malalas's terminology may partly be anachronistic as the *limitanei* appear not before 363 in our sources, the division of the army into border troops (*limitanei*) and field army (*comitatenses*—first mentioned in 325) dates back to Diocletian and Constantine and presents one of the most pertinent army reforms in Roman history. Zosimus's criticism of Constantine that the first Christian emperor placed

troops away from the frontier zones in cities needs to be seen in this context—although the pagan author intended to blame Constantine for ineffective border defense (Zosimus 2.34).

In 1976, Edward Luttwak elaborated the idea that the Roman Empire must have had a grand strategy (Luttwak 1976). He perceived three stages of this grand strategy from Augustus to the end of the third century. For Diocletian and the period of the Tetrarchy, Luttwak proposed the last stage, a "defence-in-depth" strategy—militarized zones at the frontiers with the *limitanei* at the immediate borders as first defense and able, mobile troops in the rear. While Luttwak's conclusions have largely been refuted by ancient historians, the question of a Roman grand strategy in the absence of Roman military theory is still ongoing (Wheeler 1993; Kagan 2006).

When Diocletian came to power, he inherited an army that was still similar to the army from the time of Septimius Severus: it consisted of around thirty legions plus auxiliary troops—hardly enough to defend the empire on all fronts as the crises of the third century had made all too obvious. At the end of Diocletian's reign, the Roman army consisted of up to sixty-seven legions—a considerable increase even though the legions were reduced in size. Roughly twice as many soldiers served under the Tetrarchs and the later Roman emperors than under the Roman emperors of the second century. Emperor Gallienus (260–268) had already started to form mobile reserves away from the frontier which would, since the Tetrarchs and Constantine, become the late antique field army—the *comitatenses*, those soldiers who accompanied the emperor on campaign. In the time of Diocletian, provincial governors commanded the *limitanei* whereas the *duces* commanded the *comitatenses*.

For the deployment of troops, scholars largely rely on the *Notitia dignitatum*, a document from the early fifth century that contains the administrative organization of the Western as well as Eastern Roman Empire. It includes both civil and military offices and lists the *duces* and their army units with the places of their deployment. It may reflect for the eastern frontier to a good extent the status from the Tetrarchic period (Jones 1964, 57; see O'Hara 2013). For example, Eusebius in his *Onomasticon* confirms that the Legio X Fretensis was moved from Jerusalem to Aila at the Red Sea. However, problems of dating the *Onomasticon* to either the end of third century or the 320s complicate the picture.

The *Notitia dignitatum* only shows a snapshot, and temporary movements could not be reflected although some of them may have led to permanent resettlements of unit parts. Legions formed a minority among the (often mounted) units mentioned in the *Notitia dignitatum*, but Diocletian still created new legions around 300, among them the Legio IV Parthica that was encamped in Circesium at the Euphrates. In Palmyra the tetrarchs built a camp for the Legio I Illyricum; Bostra remained home to the Legio III Cyrenaica; and the Legio IV Martia was in Bethorum, which should be identified with Lejjun, east of the Dead Sea. The *Notitia dignitatum* also notes that camel cavalry was stationed in Palestine although ancient authors regarded this as a rather weak military tool. Overall, the military reinforcement especially of the southern theater of the eastern frontier shows that Diocletian and the Tetrarchs intended to "occupy the most marginal areas on the fringe of the desert" (Lewin 2002, 91; also Millar 1993, 174–222).

Although the epitheton *Arabicus* is attested for Constantine in an inscription from North Africa, no war against any "Arabs" or any victory besides his Persian wars is known (Retsö 2003, 467). Direct occupation of the Arabian Peninsula was not possible for either the Persians or the Romans, but spheres of influence and interest are clearly detectable. The Sasanians tried to influence the eastern and central parts, the Romans the western part. In south Arabia, successive empires in Yemen managed to stay independent for good parts of their history by balancing the influences of the two superpowers. However, in the time of Constantine, the

Romans intervened here as well: a tombstone inscription in Arabic, dated to 328, from Namāra, southeast of Damascus mentions a king of the Arabs who must have been an ally of Rome and who undertook a military campaign into Yemen for Rome (Shahîd 1984, 31–53; Retsö 2003, 467–480). Other sources indicate the king's conversion to Christianity, and since the reign of Constantine, Christian religion started to become a diplomatic tool in Roman foreign relations.

At the northern part of the eastern frontier, Armenia was the critical area of contention between Rome and Persia throughout the existence of the empires—often with the better end for the Persians. Irony of history has it, however, that after 296 Diocletian might to a certain extent be responsible in spreading Christianity as he installed Tiridates as ruler in Armenia. Tiridates is said to have Christianized the country, but the Armenian accounts that recall the king's conversion and the adoption of Christianity as state religion are late and legendary. Eusebius's statement that the pagan Maximinus Daia initiated a religious war on Christian Armenia in 311/312 is certainly a later Christian reinterpretation of the events (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 9.8.2).

Nevertheless, it can hardly be doubted that Christianity had a stronghold in Armenia from an early time, and Tiridates probably converted around 315 (Kettenhofen 2002). Independent of the questions around how many of his loyal subjects followed his example, Christianity did become the dominant faith in Armenia and a matter of identity against Persia in the centuries to come (Garsoïan 1999). In this regard, Armenia was no different from the rest of the Near East in which Christianity started to become a political force after Constantine took over the eastern half of the empire in 324.

From the "Great Persecution" to the Making of the "Holy Land"

The process of Christianization took generations, but the public triumph of Christianity came about rather quickly: the period between the "Great Persecutions" that started in 303 and lasted for years, and the imperially sponsored first ecumenical council in 325 was only around twenty years. A predecessor to the so-called "Great Persecution" of Christians in 303 was the Tetrarchic edict against the Manichaeans. It is usually dated to 302 and outlaws the Manichaean religion, a dualistic belief that was founded in Persia by Mani in the third century. Both the novelty of the religion and its "Persian" character were regarded as dangerous to the *salus*, the well-being, of the Roman Empire, and Manichaeans were threatened with the death penalty or sent to the mines (Bowman 2005, 80–81; Rees 2004, 174–175). Shortly afterward in February 303, the Tetrarchic emperors also issued an edict against the Christians: church buildings were supposed to be torn down, Christian scriptures were to be handed over and burned by the authorities, and any faithful could be made liable for punishment (Lactant., *De Mort. Persecut.* 12–13; Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 8.2.4–5). The Tetrarchs tightened the grip on Christian communities by issuing further edicts that requested all Christians to sacrifice.

The first stage of the "Great Persecutions" lasted until 305 when Diocletian retired, but the suffering was not over. Maximinus Daia continued to persecute Christians in the Near East in 306 and issued another edict in 309. He is most likely also the emperor under whom the Roman soldier Sergius was martyred. Sergius's remains were buried at Resafa south of the Euphrates, close to the border with Persia. The saint became one of the most venerated saints of late antiquity, and Resafa was a major pilgrimage center in the fifth and sixth centuries (Key Fowden 1999). Persecutions may have been more severe in the Near East than in the West (probably not the least because in the East more and larger Christian communities existed)

and continued until 313 when Maximinus Daia also issued an edict of tolerance for Christians shortly before Licinius and Constantine defeated him.

The "Great Persecutions" had strong repercussions in Christian literature—they inspired Lactantius to write on the death of the persecutors—but are absent from pagan literature. Their immediate impact on the communities and cities in the Near Eastern provinces might therefore have been less dramatic than Christian authors may want us to believe. However, for Christianity's self-representation in the following centuries it was a central focal point and, considering the drastic transformation of Christianity in the early fourth century, the "Great Persecutions" became part of collective memory. Within a decade of Diocletian's death, Christianity was a licit religion; within the next decade it become an imperially favored religion; and since then it has played a major political role for the whole Roman Empire.

One result of the "Constantinian turn" became visible during the tenure of the first Christian emperor: the making of the "Holy Land." After the Council of Nicaea in 325, Constantine (and his mother Helena) initiated a new building program for churches, especially in and around Jerusalem. The most important church was certainly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Euseb., *De vita Constantini* 3.29–40) which was dedicated in a grandiose ceremony in 335. However, all of Palestine gained ideological importance as the Old and New Testament were the new historical horizon of late antique Christians, and the biblical narratives manifested themselves in the topographical places of the "Holy Land": Bethlehem, where Christ was born; Jerusalem for multiple reasons; but also other places in Palestine that pilgrims visited throughout late antiquity (Hunt 1982). Constantine's mother Helena is said to have traveled to the "Holy Land" in 326 and to have built churches in Bethlehem as well as on the Mount of Olives. The first Christian pilgrim whose report survived is the so-called Pilgrim of Bordeaux who visited the "Holy Land" in the 330s.

The making of the "Holy Land" was a rapid development: Eusebius in his *The Martyrs of Palestine* could narrate a scene from the "Great Persecutions" in which the Roman governor of Palestine "put the same questions to him [a Christian martyr] again and again as to what and where situated the city of Jerusalem was which he had mentioned" (Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* 11.11). Even if Eusebius does not provide a historically accurate account (and the pun of the story was the martyr's reference to the celestial Jerusalem), his contemporary readers or hearers must have considered the story credible enough that the local governor may not have known Jerusalem by this name. Jaś Elsner speaks of "the non-city of Jerusalem" (Elsner 2000, 189): Jerusalem had been a backwater city since its destruction under Emperor Vespasian (69–79) in the first century, officially known under its Roman name Aelia Capitolina that was built on the ruins of the Jewish Jerusalem.

This was to change completely in the centuries following the reign of Constantine. As Eusebius notes: "New Jerusalem was built at the very Testimony to the Saviour, facing the famous Jerusalem of old, which after the bloody murder of the Lord had been overthrown in utter devastation and paid the penalty of its wicked inhabitants" (Euseb., *De vita Constantini* 3.33). The Pilgrim of Bordeaux describes Jerusalem as the new capital in the East and the ideological center of the Christian empire (Elsner 2000, 194). Since the fifth century it became a major ecclesiastical center in the Eastern Roman Empire.

Conclusions

Franz Grillparzer's poem of 1820 contrasted the Colosseum as symbol of classical Rome with the Christian cross that ruled the new dull times ("neue, flache Zeit") of the post-classical

world. Grillparzer unintentionally perpetuates here the tradition of ancient authors to side either with Diocletian or Constantine, depending on their religious convictions. However, when it comes to matters of state, that is, the reforms of administration, army, and border defense, Constantine continued and deepened the reforms that had started under Diocletian. Considering the devastating defeats of the third century, with Valerian's capture in 260 as the most humiliating moment for Rome (Caldwell 2018), but also after the conflict with the Palmyrenians that had considerably weakened the Roman army and its defense system, Roman emperors focused on the defenses of the eastern frontier as well as policing the Near Eastern provinces. Already the fact that Diocletian took over the East together with his Caesar Galerius while he left the West to his co-rulers, shows the strategic importance of the Near Eastern provinces. From the available evidence, it seems that particularly Diocletian and his Caesar Galerius have to be credited with the military defense of the eastern frontier, and Fergus Millar has called these years crucial for the integration of the Near Eastern provinces into the imperial system (Millar 1993, 179). Numerous Tetrarchic milestones from the southern Aravah, the imperial highway that connected Jerusalem with Aila at the Red Sea, show the emperors' care for the remote areas at the eastern frontier (Roll and Avner 2008)—their "need for another Palmyra" (Wheeler 2007, 253).

With the establishment of Constantinople as capital, the Roman Near East moved closer to the heart of the empire, and through Constantine's conversion, an ideological wave and economic boom hit Palestine as the new "Holy Land." To that, further pilgrimage sites in other Near Eastern provinces can be added that were established in late antiquity and blossomed throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. In terms of administrative and military politics, the foundation of the Roman Near East in late antiquity was built by Diocletian but culturally and economically, Constantine's favoring of Christianity determined imperial politics for the following centuries.

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CHAPTER 24

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE NEAR EAST

Plurality, Variation, and Innovation

NATHANAEL ANDRADE

The "religious landscape" (Bonnet 2015) of Roman Dura-Europos, a middle Euphrates "crossroads" (Brody and Hoffmann 2011), was pluralistic. When Persians captured the third-century city, residents treasured the Greek and Aramaean goddesses Artemis and Atargatis at adjacent temples (Duchâteau 2013, 225–272). Soldiers venerated the north Syrian and Iranian gods Jupiter Dolichenus (Schwarzer 2012, 145–147) and Mithras (Gnoli 2016). Palmyrenes celebrated their ancestral gods, many being Aramaean or Arabian (Duchâteau 2013, 449–506). Civic or military officials organized cults for Roman deities and even long-dead Seleucid kings (*P. Dura* 24, 54; Haynes 2013, 198–206; Stoll 2001, 160–176). Villagers from Anath attended temples for their divinities (Duchâteau 2013, 303–350). Jews convened in a synagogue (Noy 2007, 63–72), Christians in a house church (Peppard 2016).

We have begun with Dura-Europos's landscape to glimpse the stunning diversity of cult in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. By doing so, we encounter those who enabled it: civilians and soldiers; locals and migrants; imperial and municipal authorities; Jewish synagogue leaders and Christian priests; men, women, and children. We also glimpse the social units that shaped religious landscapes and their "local variety" (Kaizer 2008). We witness households, extended families, villages, cities, congregations, local and regional networks, imperial states, and communities of Jews and Christians. In such landscapes, worshippers forged many different religious lives and wrought change, continuity, discontinuity, and innovation in dazzling combinations (Blömer, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2015a; on "lived religion," Gasparini et al. 2020). They prayed in Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic, and other languages. They worshipped gods with statues, reliefs, empty thrones, "aniconic" stones, or no likenesses at all. They made sacrifices of animals, wine, incense, oils, and foodstuffs, and they engaged in ritual banquets. They venerated the gods of ancestors, imperial authorities, or charismatic preachers. Some such gods were widely worshipped, others local. Many arrived with Aramaeans, Canaanites, Luwians, Arabians, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, or Romans (Sartre 2001, 37–57, 887–899). Many were newly invented.

With such premises in mind, this chapter identifies key factors that structured pluralistic religious landscapes. These were overwhelmingly determined by local identities and contexts (Kaizer 2013). But even so, their pluralism was shaped by intersecting social relationships ranging from the microcosmic to the "global" (on globalization, Pitts and Versluys 2015; for this approach to Commagene, Blömer et al. 2021). To support such an argument, this article provides glimpses of how various social phenomena shaped local religious landscapes between the lifetimes of Alexander the Great and Muhammad. Being selective, it emphasizes the relatively well-documented periods of the Roman Empire, even if addressing religious life in the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Empires too. Likewise, while touching upon religious movements with transregional or universal aspirations, it focuses mainly on traditional polytheistic worship. Perhaps we cannot know why people chose to pursue certain religious

lives. But we can contemplate the landscapes and relationships that made their choices possible.

Households and Kinship

In AD 86, a man named Diogenes, with his wife, mother, and children, helped build the mountaintop sanctuary for Zeus Madbachos and Selamane at Koruphe, near Antioch (*IGLS* II, 465–466; Millar 1993, 254–255; Callot and Marcillet-Jaubert 1984, 187–192; Sartre 2001, 925 and 2005, 317). His dedicatory inscriptions illuminate his familial connections. Despite some ambiguities (*IGLS* II, 465 [commentary]; Callot and Marcillet-Jaubert 1984, 190), Diogenes's paternal uncle Theophilus had apparently adopted him as son, and Diogenes had married Theophilus's daughter. For all of them, Zeus Madbachos and Selamane were "ancestral divinities" (*theoi patrioi*).

From Diogenes's example, we can detect how households steered worshippers toward cults, sacred precincts, and priesthoods, or even initiated them. Lebanon and south Syria thus fielded worshippers for the gods of Aumos, Maleichathos, and other obscure cult founders (for example, *IGLS* XI, 20; XV, 92, 254, 259, 275–276, 288–289, 330 and XVI, 1.24–27, with commentaries). In a north Syrian village, three brothers established a temple's gateway in ad 161 (*IGLS* II, 569). Decades later, kinship groups of a south Syrian village venerated Tyche (*IGLS* XV, 90, with commentary). At Parthian Dura-Europos, related households organized worship, priesthoods, women's associations, and temples for Atargatis, Aphlad, and other gods (Dirven 2005, 10–13; Andrade 2013, 222–232; Duchâteau 2013, 196–199, 258–267, 609–611). At Palmyra, prominent households contributed construction and priests to one sacred precinct over generations (Bounni 1992–2004, esp. 2:27–48, no. 42, fig. 108; see Raja 2017a). A tribe's men and women did the same for their god Baal-Shamin (fig. 24.1) (Kaizer 2002, 89–108; Cussini 2005, 29–30).

FIGURE 24.1. Temple of Baal-Shamin, Palmyra. Photo by Nathanael Andrade.

Households and kinship thus shaped long-standing continuities and changes in religious life. But participation in Christian communities, or embracing their ascetic lifestyles, sometimes fractured families and villages. The father of the famous churchman Rabula, a priest at Chalcis on Belus (Qenneshrin), reportedly sacrificed a bull offered by the emperor Julian (361–363) (Phenix and Horn 2017, 4–7). Still, households and kin perpetuated Christian worship too, especially after the fourth century. Parents pledged children to rural monasteries, just as they had previously for local cults (Brooks 1923, 60–65; *IGLS* XIV, 549–553). In south Syrian villages, households and kinship groups funded churches for holy figures like Elijah and Sergius (*IGLS* XV, 181, 184, 186, 363, and 397). At north Syrian Apamea, Jewish kinsmen, women included, contributed mosaic pavements to a synagogue (*IJO*, Syr. 53–55; Noy 2007, 72–73). Households and kin even perpetuated polytheistic practices after municipal support had lapsed, sometimes in private (Caseau 2011a). In the late 530s, a north Syrian polytheist reportedly sacrificed bulls in his house (Brooks 1907, 66–67).

When Muhammad undertook his religious mission at Mecca and Medina, households and kinship continued their work. The impact of Muhammad's religious life would far exceed those of Syria's obscure cult founders. But he too had to navigate a social universe of kinship units (Munt 2014, 42–64; al-Azmah 2014, 126–132, 154–162).

Iron Age Settlement, Migration, and Movement

The hilltop sanctuary at Doliche, in northernmost ancient Syria, has produced evidence for cult worship from the Iron Age to Roman times (Winter 2011; 2017; Blömer, chapter 39, this volume). A Roman-period relief also reflects Iron Age iconographies that resurfaced elsewhere in contemporary Syria (Blömer 2011; 2015a). These involved gods standing on the backs of animals and priests worshipping at altars (Blömer 2015b; Bunnens 2015). If not worshipping Jupiter Dolichenus, people at Iron Age Doliche venerated a precursor.

From Doliche's example, we see how Iron Age settlement profoundly impacted religious landscapes. It also shaped the worship of Atargatis and Hadad at Hierapolis-Manbog, located in a north Syrian zone of Aramaean and Luwian presence, as it clearly did Damascus and its massive temple complex (Burns 2005, 16–17; Freyberger 1989; 2006). On the eve of Alexander's conquests, local dynasts at Hierapolis minted silver coins that portrayed them as priests (Andrade 2017, Series 5). Their cults persisted under the Romans, when Lucian of Samosata reported that cult statues featured "the Assyrian Hera" and Zeus as mounted on lions and bulls (Lucian., *Syr. D.* 15, 31–32; Lightfoot 2003, 18–22, 361–363). The depictions of priests and gods just mentioned bore the Iron Age iconographies described earlier.

Elsewhere, Iron Age traditions persisted, or reemerged (Bunnens 2015, 118–120). Jewish priests maintained an ancestral cult site at Jerusalem. At Mesopotamian cities like Assur, Nineveh, Uruk, and Babylon, temples, ziggurats, religious rites, and sometimes even royal patronage persisted under Seleucid and Parthian rule, which introduced new gods and customs (Haider 2008; Linssen 2004; Downey 1988, 7–50, 137–158; for Parthian Zoroastrians, de Jong 2013, 33–36). Throughout the Near East, temples bore kindred features (Gawlikowski 1989; Downey 1988; Clarke 2015), and people worshipped at high places or represented gods with empty thrones or stones (Tac., *Hist*. 2.78.3–4; Hdn. 5.3.5; Gaifman 2008; Stewart 2008; Alpass 2013, 68–83; Bonnet 2015, 385–398; Sartre 2001, 889–890, 923–925; 2005, 316–317). Jews, Christians, and later Muslims all found sanctity in places sacred since the Iron Age (the Temple Mount of Jerusalem, for example), and along with Manichaeans, they militated against long-standing traditions of divine likenesses or adapted practices of worshipping without them. Altogether, patterns of Iron Age settlement brought enduring features to local religious landscapes, even as these transformed.

Civic and Religious Communities: Cities and Villages, Temples and Churches

During the first–second centuries AD, various people at Gerasa, officially Antioch on the Chrysorhoas, contributed to imposing sanctuaries for Zeus Olympios and Artemis (Raja 2017b, 172–178; Seigne 1997). These attracted citizen donations. So did Palmyra's temple of Bel (Kaizer 2006), the massive temples at Heliopolis-Baalbek (Paturel 2019, 194–223, 260–275), and the large complex at Damascus (Freyberger 1989, 65–66; 2006, 168–170).

From such examples, we glimpse how the civic contexts of Greek *poleis* and Roman *coloniae* structured religious landscapes. Other types of municipal and religious communities played similar roles too. During the Iron Age, dynastic priestly elites governed temples at places like Babylon, Sidon, Hierapolis-Manbog, and Jerusalem (Bonnet 2015, 211–231; Andrade 2017; Schwartz 2014, 23–29, 39–89; Linnsen 2004). Subsequently, Seleucid regional governors oversaw them (Cotton-Paltiel, Ecker, and Gera 2017, with *SEG* XXIX, 1613 and *OGIS* 230; Capdetrey 2007, 321–329). But under the Romans, most temples and priesthoods, like even those for Zeus at

Baitokaike, were managed by municipal or village authorities (*IGLS* VII, 4028; Bonnet 2015, 133–147; Kaizer 2005, 187–188). Jerusalem's priestly families were exceptional. But even these were deposed by ad 70.

By Roman times, village communities structured rural religious landscapes, and even urban ones (Sartre 2001, 766–778; 2005, 224–232). At Dura Europos, local villagers organized a cult for Aphlad, and perhaps Azzanathkona (Duchâteau 2013, 338–345). In north Syria, Mikkalos, called Zaarougas, established his village's temple (*IGLS* II, 581). At modern Dmeir, a local notable usurped the priesthood of the village sanctuary, but aggrieved peasants appealed to the emperor Caracalla to stop him (Roussel and de Visscher 1942–1943; Millar 1993, 319). At Sia`, village communities maintained a vast precinct for Baal-Shamin (Millar 1993, 394–395; Kropp 2013, 290–302). Village temples speckled Lebanon (Aliquot 2009, esp. 112–126), south Syria (*IGLS* XV, 92, 96, 161, 298, for example), and Palestine into the fifth century (Euseb., *De vita Constantini* 55; *Life of Porphyry* 64–67, 75–77; Sozom., *Hist. eccl*. 2.4–5; Soc. 1.18.5–11). But by then, villages were building or frequenting Christian churches (*IGLS* XIII, 9713; XV, 179, for example).

After 312, Christian churches and their authorities incrementally came to dominate religious landscapes. They had support from emperors, who confiscated temple property, funded churches or monasteries (Euseb., *De vita Constantini* 3.25–39 and 58; Sozom., *Hist. eccl*. 2.4–5; Soc. 1.18.5–11; Lenski 2016, 167–206), and eventually banned polytheistic practices (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10–12, 25; *Cod. Iust.* 1.11.7–9). With their ample resources, bishops and monks suppressed traditional cult sites and established places of worship (Theod., *Hist. eccl.* 5.21–22; Sozom., *Hist. eccl*. 7.15.11–15; Lib., *Or.* 30; Trombley 1993–1994, 1.99–122, 2.133–142, 247–312). Churches pervaded cityscapes like those of Antioch, Gerasa, and most famously Jerusalem (Mayer 2012; Moralee 2006; Magness 2012, 320–332). Christians transgressed traditional prohibitions by burying relics in urban centers like Sebaste or near sacred sites, like the shrine to Apollo in Daphne (Philostorgius 7.4; Theod., *Hist. eccl.* 7.2; Julian., *Mis.* 34–35; Ioh. Chrys., *Bab.* and *Hom. Bab.*; Belayche 2001, 302–303). Civic and institutional support for public polytheistic practice unraveled. When the emperor Julian (361–363) attended a sacrifice in Antioch, the priest only offered a goose (Julian., *Mis.* 34). The hilltop sanctuary at Koruphe became dormant (Theod., *Hist. relig.* 4.2; Trombley 1993–1994, 2.145). Yet, the transition happened unevenly. In the sixth century, Heliopolis-Baalbek harbored "pagans" (Phenix and Horn 2017, 24–25; Brooks 1952, 154 [3.27]; Trombley 1993–1994, 2.150–155; Rheidt 2014, 158–167). At Harran, polytheist priests were active (Brooks 1907, 66–67).

Another important religious unit was the synagogue, where Jews gathered for prayer and sacred readings before and after the Jewish Temple was destroyed in ad 70. After the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135), many Jews perhaps embraced mainstream Greek and Roman practices (Schwartz 2001, 129–176). But in later centuries, Jews forged religious lives in synagogues. Numerous sites in Galilee, including Sepphoris, Tiberias, and Huqoq, have fielded remains and mosaics. Outside Palestine, Dura-Europos, Apamea, and Gerasa held noteworthy synagogues too (Levine 2005; Magness 2012, 256–319; Magness et al. 2014; Britt and Roustan 2017; Haensch, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2017).

As Christian authorities (and Jewish rabbis) sought to suppress polytheistic practices, they prohibited sacrificing and consuming animal offerings or tending to statues of gods by burning incense, pouring libations, lighting ritual lamps, or providing apparel for them (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12; M. Sanhed. 7.6, with T.J. Sanhed. 7.11–12; Sozom., *Hist. eccl*. 2.4; Belayche 2001, 35–36; Karivieri 2010). They condemned unauthorized divination, incantations, or purification rituals practised (*Didache* 3.4, 6.3). They destroyed, disfigured, or desacralized cult statues, lamps, and objects associated with religious rites at Caesarea Maritima, Scythopolis, the Antiochene, Palmyra, and other places (Caseau 2011b; Blömer, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2015b;

Eliav, Friedland, and Herbert 2008; Kristensen 2013, 197–251). Polytheistic rituals, including Platonist theurgy, had involved these (Karivieri 2010, 425–427; Trombley 2008, 146–147).

Even so, Christian practices were not uniform, and they often featured commonalities with those of polytheists and Jews. Doctrinal disputes brought ecclesiastical schisms (Schor 2011; Menze 2008). Christians, Jews, and polytheists embraced certain popular practices, like using curse tablets, bowl incantations, and amulets while invoking divine beings (Hollman 2003; 2011; *IGLS* XIIIbis, 9474; Levene 2003; Shaked et al. 2013; Moriggi 2014; Karivieri 2011, 405–415, 422–423). Christians eventually integrated libations and incense into religious services (Harvey 2006, 1–97). Polytheists, Christians, and Jews practiced ritual bathing and banqueting, and they prayed with raised arms (*Didache* 7, 9–10; *IDélos* 2530; Kaizer 2008b; Harvey and Hunter 2008; Hezser 2010). Christian worshippers petitioned holy men, living and dead, just as Palmyrenes petitioned attentive gods (Kubiak 2013; Vat. Syr. 160, fol. 77–79). Even ca. 400, John Chrysostom rebuked Christians who participated in Jewish religious life (Ioh. Chrys., *adv. Iud.*, esp. 1; Shepardson 2014, 113–116) or swore oaths as polytheists did (Maxwell 2006, 149–151). Christians appropriated traditional sacred sites (or synagogues), made them into churches, and created origin narratives for their Christian spaces (Tsafrir 1998; Trombley 1993–1994, 1:108–146, 188–245, 2.134–204, 247–379; Haensch, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2017; Noy 2007, 77–78; Busine 2013). In a south Syrian village, inscriptions celebrated how churches had replaced houses for demons (*IGLS* XV, 177, 186; Trombley 1993–1994, 1:104). By the fifth century, churches inhabited the destroyed Samaritan temple at Gerizim and the sacred precinct at Heliopolis-Baalbek (Tsafrir 1998, 199; Rheidt 2014, 164–167). At a bath complex of Gadara dedicated to Elijah, worshippers lit lamps and incense to secure cures for ailments, as polytheists had long done for their gods (Belayche 2001, 268–273; but see Graf 2015, 241–245). Christians appropriated long-standing sacred sites in Sasanian Mesopotamia too (Walker 2006–2007). Even as Christian churches and monasteries transformed religious landscapes, traditional practices persisted within them.

Once Arab Muslims governed the Near East, mosques too marked urban landscapes. Muslims built them at or near churches in many places, including Resafa, Damascus, Aleppo, Gerasa, Amman, Bostra, and Palmyra. Most famously, mosques adorned Jerusalem and its Temple Mount (Schick 1995; Guidetti 2016, esp. 36–70). They thus competed with the same Christian churches that had come to dominate religious landscapes.

Empires and Kingdoms

According to an inscription made in AD 167, a figure named Rabbel was the grand-priest and symposiarch of Bel and the priest for the Roman emperors at Palmyra (*IGLS* XVII, 1.351). While famed for its Aramaean, Arabian, and Babylonian gods, Palmyra harbored the Roman imperial cult too. The Roman emperor was also worshipped alongside Zeus Olympios at Gerasa (Welles 1938, nos. 2, 10). At Faqra (rural Lebanon), a tower was dedicated to the emperor Claudius and Zeus Beelgalasos (fig. 24.2) (Kropp 2013, 332–338; Rey-Coquais 1999, 638).

FIGURE 24.2. Tower at Faqra. Photo by Nathanael Andrade.

From examples like these, we see how vast empires, and smaller dynastic states, shaped local religious landscapes. After Alexander's conquests, imperial and dynastic states structured settlement, civic organization, regional cultures, and expressions of local religious identity. Under the Seleucids, Greek settlers brought their language, gods, iconographies, and practices to the religious landscapes of Antioch, Seleucia on the Tigris, Jebel Khalid, and elsewhere (Wright 2012). Ptolemaic influences brought divinities too. At Laodicea, civic priests served Sarapis and Isis (*IGLS* IV, 1261). Cults to Isis and Osiris apparently shaped the worship of Astarte and Adonis near Phoenician Byblos (Bonnet 2015, 164–188). Under the Romans, inscribed religious dedications were frequently in Greek, and local divinities often received Olympian names and Aramaic epithets. Zeus Beelbaaros, Zeus Beelgalasos, Zeus Madbachos, Zeus Marnas, and Zeus Damaskenos are a few (*IGLS* II, 465–466, XIV, 330 and 486; *Life of Porphyry* 19; Sartre 2001, 901–902 and 2005, 306). Still, Aramaic and Near Eastern languages persisted in religious contexts. Palmyra, Edessa, Palestine, and sixth-century Zebed, with its trilingual inscription, provide visible examples (*IGLS* II, 310).

Imperial militaries also structured religious landscapes. Seleucid soldiers worshipped both Apollo and gods reflecting the army's diverse ethnic composition (Wright 2012, 45–46). They carried their cults wherever they resided. Under the Romans, soldiers transported their gods too (Stoll 2001). Garrisons and soldiers circulated the cult for Jupiter Dolichenus throughout the Roman Empire (Blömer and Winter 2012). They brought Mithras to Dura-Europos, Apamea (or

nearby Hawarte), and Caesarea Maritima (Gawlikowski 2007; Bull et al. 2017; Gnoli 2016). They transported Jupiter Hammon to Bostra (*IGLS* XIII, 9107, with 9010–9011). They carried Italian gods, and imperial worship, throughout the Near East. Local residents adopted gods from soldiers, and imparted their own.

Imperial structures enabled dynastic cults. The Seleucid dynasty had one, and municipal cults worshipped kings too (*IK* 65.271, 278, 453; Wright 2012, 49–71). Starting in the first century bc, client kings established cults for the Roman emperor or Rome itself. Herod I famously did this in several cities of Palestine, including Caesarea Maritima (Kropp 2013, 262–275 and 317–332). Subsequently, people worshipped Roman emperors through a provincial *koinon*, regional eparchies or *koina*, or municipal cults (Bru 2011, 272–285; Butcher 2003, 370–371). Some client kings started cults for their dynasties. Nabataean royals apparently had one eventually (Kropp 2013, 302–309; Kaizer 2010, 120–121). The colossal statues, reliefs, and inscriptions of Antiochus I of Commagene at Nemrud Dagi and elsewhere depicted him as peer to numerous gods, even if his cult did not take root (Versluys 2017). Intriguingly, his religious life may also reflect continuities in dynastic Zoroastrian practices that Persian imperialism had brought to Commagene centuries earlier (De Jong 2021), just as the Parthian Arsacids apparently embraced ones that locals then adopted, with variations, in some of their territories (De Jong 2013, 31–36).

Otherwise, client kings of the Romans and Parthians funded vast temples to promote dynastic legitimacy. Herod I notably did so in several cities, including Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima (Kropp 2013, 262–275). Ituraean dynasts may have established the precursors to the huge temples at Heliopolis-Baalbek (Kaizer 2005, 187; Paturel 2019, 110–111; but see Kropp 2013, 275–280). Nabataean kings built or contributed to sacred precincts at Petra, especially the Qasr al-Bint (fig. 24.3) (Kropp 2013, 281–290; Alpass 2013, 56–59; Kaizer 2010, 118–121). At Hatra (Dirven 2013), rulers maintained temples, and sometimes priesthoods, for Shamash and other gods (Kaizer 2005, 183–184; 2010, 121–122). We have already commented on Antiochus I of Commagene.

FIGURE 24.3. Qasr al-Bint, Petra. Photo by Nathanael Andrade.

Imperial structuring also stimulated social networks and movement of civilians. These promoted local cults outside their home territories. During the Hellenistic period, north Syrians established a sanctuary for Atargatis and Hadad on Delos (Will 1985). But Roman imperial intervention, its regional *koina*, and its networks enabled Atargatis's widespread promotion. She thus saw worship in parts of Lebanon, Petra, Palmyra, and Dura-Europos (Lightfoot 2003; Duchâteau 2013, 255–272). Sometimes her cult was local (Rey-Coquais 1999, 638–640; Aliquot 2009, 135 n. 54; Kaizer 2015, 26). But in certain places, her worshippers associated her with Hierapolis-Manbog or a regional reputation as a "Syrian goddess" (*IGLS* VI, 2929, with 2936, XI, 45; Alpass 2013, 105, no. 23; Kaizer 2015, 26, for example) and even named children Mambogaios (Lightfoot 2001). Likewise, a divinity, probably Pakeidas, was promoted by Gerasenes as "the Arabian god" under Roman rule (Kubiak-Schneider and Lichtenberger 2022; Andrade 2022), despite the widespread worship of Dusares by Nabataeans (Alpass 2015).

Even as they adopted the Roman Empire's ecumenical practices, worshippers maintained distinctive local or regional cults and cultural expressions (Andrade 2013). We have already seen how they revived discontinued Iron Age practices, or transformed local traditions into region-wide phenomena. As already noted, Greek speakers worshipped "the Syrian goddess" (Atargatis) and "the Arabian god" or invoked the gods of a city or village with Olympian names and Aramaic epithets. Various communities thus adopted aniconic stones for their cult likenesses, as the Emesenes visibly did for Elagabalus (Stewart 2008, 309–312). A Roman *colonia* could even harbor the unique sanctuaries of Heliopolis-Baalbek.

Empires had a vast impact on Jewish communities. After generations of Ptolemaic and Seleucid patronage, Antiochus IV (175–164 BC) suppressed the ancestral Jewish cult at Jerusalem. This triggered a serious revolt, renewed commitment to the Torah, and reinforced narratives of martyrdom (Collins 2017, 1–61). Under Herodian and Roman rule, diasporic Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and the rebuilt Jewish Temple was completed (Schwartz 2014,

63–65). Yet Herodian collaboration with the Roman state inspired discontented pietistic and Messianic movements (Schwartz 2014, 66–74). After the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple in 70 and suppressed the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135), rabbis advised Jews on how to maintain ethnic and religious boundaries in cities dominated by traditional polytheistic or Christian communities. Their legal corpora, like the Mishnah, challenged Roman ideological hegemony. Their authority, initially limited, grew over late antiquity (Schwartz 2001; Lapin 2012).

Likewise, Christian communities were shaped by Roman imperialism. We have seen how critiques of Roman authority encouraged Messianic preachers, like Jesus of Nazareth, in first-century Palestine. The empire's authorities sharpened distinctions between Christians and Jews (Heemstra 2010), and its coercive sexual economy elicited Christian celibacy (Harper 2013). Its persecutions, particularly ca. 300, prompted subsequent Christians to celebrate martyrdom. Thereafter, state patronage made Christian communities dominant, determined their regional organization, and promoted one faction over others (Gaddis 2005; Menze 2008; Wood 2010; Schor 2011). Imperial structures enabled Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and churches, many imperially funded, dominated its landscape (Magness 2012, 320–332). We have already seen how imperial intervention promoted Christian primacy.

Farther east, the Sasanian Persian empire created Zoroastrian institutions in which priests were state officials. These established fire altars and suppressed traditional polytheistic worship (Gignoux 1983; 1991; Huyse 1999; Kalmin 2008, 630; Payne 2015, 33). Under its patronage, rabbis compiled the Babylonian Talmud (Kalmin 2008; Mokhtarian 2015). Its executions of fourth-century Christians prompted narratives of martyrdom. But after 410 its patronage enabled the Church of the East to extend throughout Asia (Payne 2015; Smith 2016; Baumer 2016).

In the seventh century, Arab imperialism had a profound impact too. Islam took root throughout a vast territory. Christians and Jews sought Muslim patronage, as subordinates. Christian groups writing in Syriac, Greek, Arabic, and many Aramaic dialects persisted under Islamic governance. But over time, imperial conditions elicited the conversion of Christians (Griffiths 2008, esp. 11–17; Schick 1995, 139–158), as they had previously done for polytheists.

Global Trends

Starting ca. 240, a charismatic preacher named Mani, traveling throughout Mesopotamia, Iran, central Asia, and north India, built a religious movement that interwove elements borrowed from Zoroastrians, Christians, Jains, and Buddhists. His followers continued his work after his execution by King Vahram II. By ca. 300, Manichaean communities populated Afro-Eurasia from the Mediterranean to central Asia, soon to proceed farther (Lieu 1985; Dilley 2013).

While Mani found inspiration in Buddha and Zarathustra, one prophetic figure that he emulated was Jesus of Nazareth, a native of first-century Galilee. After Jesus's crucifixion in Jerusalem, his followers preached throughout the eastern empire and attracted the uncircumcised. Their message quickly spread throughout the Near East and Mediterranean. In subsequent centuries, it penetrated Asia. By the Arab conquests, it had reached China (Wilken 2012; McGuckin 2017).

The Manichaean and Christian movements traveled across Afro-Eurasia in part because the Near East's religious landscapes were linked to "global" phenomena (I thank Kostas Vlassopoulos for the observation). Polytheists, Jews, Manichaeans, and Christians alike consumed the myrrh, frankincense, pepper, and other aromatics that commercial networks

connecting Afro-Eurasia had brought from the Indian Ocean world (Harvey 2006). Such networks attracted the movement and settlement of merchants and preachers. Yet, Manichaeans had overtly global aspirations (Gardner and Lieu 2004, 109–111). Throughout Eurasia, Christian church hierarchies earned state patronage. By roughly Muhammad's lifetime, Christians, Manichaeans, and Jews populated the Indian and Pacific rim (Wink 1991; Andrade 2018, 207–238).

With their global aspirations, Manichaeans and Christians prompted imperial authorities to define far-flung religious lives and landscapes. They stimulated state-sponsored Zoroastrian organization throughout Sasanian Iran (BeDuhn 2015; Dilley 2015; de Jong 2013, 37–42) and pressed Tetrarchic emperors to define Roman religious practice (Rees 2004, 57–71; Gaddis 2005, 29–34). After engaging in abortive persecutions, authorities both Roman (after 312) and Persian (after 410) protected, patronized, and promoted Christian subjects. Thereafter Christian churchmen, monks, and imperial authorities incrementally suppressed most traditional polytheism by the coming of Islam. By doing so, they drove polytheist emperors like the Tetrarchs and Julian, and Syrians like Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Libanius, to define their religious systems (Sandwell 2007, 176–180; Johnson 2013). They also prompted Jewish rabbis to mark their religious boundaries (Schwartz 2001, 179–180 and 2014, 128–143; Boyarin 2004, 11–13 and 202–225).

If Mani found inspiration in Jesus of Nazareth, the Prophet Muhammad did too. He and his successors had global aspirations for their religious lives. Through their efforts, Islam held sway over the Near East shortly after Muhammad's death (al-Azmah 2014). Within centuries, Islam had worshippers from west Africa to Indonesia. In so many ways, Jews, Christians, Manichaeans, and Muslims, all rooted in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East, came to have a profound impact on its religious landscapes, and those of late antique Afro-Eurasia (Wink 1991). But they spelled the slow death of traditional polytheism and its pluralism within them.

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CHAPTER 25

THE CHRISTIAN NEAR EAST IN LATE ANTIQUITY

VOLKER MENZE

There I saw a disgraceful sight:
the standard of the captor set up on the tower,
the corpse of the persecutor laid in a coffin.
Believe in "yes" and "no", the word of a trustworthy man,
that I went right up, my brothers, to the coffin of the filthy one,
and I stood over him and derided his paganism
and said, "Is this indeed he who exalted himself
against the Living Name and forgot that he is dust?"
[God] turned him back into his dust to let him know he was of dust.
I stood and wondered at him whose downfall I had so fully seen.
(Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns against Julian* 3.3–4 [McVey 1989, 244–245])

Introduction

Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 300–373) was not only one of the greatest poets of the Syriac language but also one of its earliest proponents. Syriac as well as other Near Eastern languages became literary languages for Christian texts in the centuries following the "Constantinian turn" of the Roman Empire. Ephrem wrote the lines cited in the chapter epigraph in 363 when the defeated Roman army brought back the corpse of Emperor Julian (361–363) from his fateful campaign against Persia. The Romans stopped outside Nisibis on their retreat west while the Persians raised their flag on the citadel of the city as Ephrem remarks. After Julian's defeat, Rome conceded the city to the Persians, and for the last ten years of his life, Ephrem was a refugee in Edessa.

The venerated author and theologian was an eyewitness to dramatic developments that influenced the Christian communities in the Near East for centuries to come. Throughout his youth he lived under a non-Christian emperor, Licinius (308–324), before Constantine (306–337) defeated his co-emperor in 324 and took over the eastern half of the Roman Empire. After the so-called Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity was a licit religion and persecutions ended in the Roman Empire. But only after 324 could Christians in the Near East rely on an emperor who not only attempted to restitute the damages that had been done to the Christian communities throughout the empire but also favored Christians through legal measures.

Making Christianity the imperially favored religion almost immediately evoked a problem: Which Christianity? Shortly after Constantine started to rule over the united empire, he summoned the first ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325, and bishops from especially the eastern part of the empire traveled on the imperial budget to Nicaea to debate questions of doctrine. Arius (ca. 260–336), a presbyter from Alexandria, quarreled with his bishop Alexander concerning the relationship of Father and Son. Arius considered the Father to be greater than Christ whereas his opponents considered their relationship to be "homoousios," that is, consubstantial—to be of the same essence. The "Nicenes," those bishops who formed the majority at Nicaea, condemned Arius as a heretic. This did not end the "Arian" controversy

but was rather the start of the late antique quest for "orthodoxy," a quest that left its mark also in the work of Ephrem, who was a staunch defender of Nicaea (Shepardson 2008).

Ephrem was confronted for most of his time with an emperor who favored "Arianism": Constantius II (337–361), the son of Constantine, first ruled the eastern half of the empire and after 350 also the western part. For Christians things got worse with Constantius's cousin and successor Julian "the Apostate" who, although being the first emperor raised as a Christian, attempted to bring back the old gods. Despite his short rule and the ultimate failure of his attempt to turn back the wheel, his patronage of "paganism" (or: "polytheism") disturbed Christian theologians profoundly, including Ephrem, as his *Hymns against Julian* show.

The title "The Christian Near East in Late Antiquity" should not be misunderstood: the Near East in late antiquity was hardly ever fully Christian but always diverse, not only when it comes to peoples, languages, etc., but also in terms of religions and cults. Before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, particularly the Jews need to be mentioned as a group that challenged Christian claims to represent the true faith. In the fifth century, restrictions and legislation against non-Christian cults and religions as well as against "heretical" Christians tightened. However, this neither erased non-Christian nor supposedly "heretical" communities. As soon as Christianity became the favored religion with Constantine, the relationship of state and church posed a tricky issue, and the chapter presents a short outline of the political history of Christianity in late antiquity. Then, Christianity is shown as embedded within the religious diversity of the Near East, and a short introduction to asceticism and monasticism in the region is offered. The particular case of the "Holy Land" and Jerusalem that attracted Christian pilgrims in the time before Constantine is examined. At the end of antiquity, independent Near Eastern ("Oriental Orthodox") churches emerged from the former Roman *Oikumene*.

Roman State, Christianity, and Orthodoxy: From Constantine I to Heraclius

Many scholars from different disciplines have attempted to measure the rate of Christian conversion and the growth of Christianity in the first three centuries: theologian Adolf von Harnack (1924), historian Ramsay MacMullen (1984), sociologist Rodney Stark (1996)—to name but a few. Christianity was a Near Eastern religion, and it was deeply rooted in the Near Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in 324 when Constantine took over the eastern half of the empire, but neither absolute nor relative numbers can be established with any certainty.

What is known, however, is that Christianity had experienced an uneasy relationship with the Roman state especially since the middle of the third century. Emperor Decius (249–251) challenged Christians with an empire-wide request for sacrifice. Neither Decius nor later Emperor Diocletian (284–305) singled out Christians, but intended to reestablish what they thought would be proper worship of the traditional gods who would in return ensure the well-being of the empire. A year before the persecutions of Christians started under the Tetrarchs in 303, Diocletian also issued legislation against the Manichaeans. The last pre-Constantinian martyrs died around 310 in Palestine as recorded by the church historian Eusebius, but fifteen years later, Eusebius was welcomed by Emperor Constantine to attend the Council of Nicaea. Constantine's favor of the Christian God and his priests on earth, the bishops, went hand in hand with pecuniary advantages for the Christian churches and their priests as well as discrimination against pagan cults and their sacrifices. The extent of Constantine's measures

against non-Christians is debated but the overall development toward a Christian Roman Empire is undisputed (Caseau 1999).

The question that challenged successive Roman emperors was *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* as Hanson called his massive study from 1988: Which doctrine should define the "orthodoxy" of the church of the empire? Scripture did not detail doctrinal questions of the relationship of God-Father and God-Son (just as later Christological questions could not be solved with the scriptures alone). Therefore, theological literature, treatises as well as polemics, flourished and became the foundational writings for the later Christian churches in East and West. The interests behind the quest for orthodoxy varied according to the role of the protagonists. Some bishops not only influenced the debates through their theological contributions but were also skilled politicians who impacted developments on the imperial as well as ecclesiastical levels in the long run. Emperors on the other hand were hardly theological connoisseurs but rather keen to reach an agreement that would ensure the unity of the imperial church, as this church increasingly mattered for the ideological foundation of the empire.

Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296–373) was an extremely influential bishop who shaped the later reception of fourth-century Christianity. According to Athanasius, virtually all of his opponents were "Arians" and "heretics," whereas the bishop of Alexandria suffered for the orthodox faith. Maybe Arius was no major theologian himself, but he triggered a debate that preoccupied theologians for decades and forced emperors to take sides in the controversies arising over the question of whether the Son was equal or only similar to God-Father. And although the Council of Nicaea was supposed to settle the debate, it preoccupied imperial politics for the next sixty years and involved twenty more councils (Hanson 1988; Ayres 2004). Emperor Theodosius I (379–395) officially ended the debate in favor of Nicene Christianity with his law *Cunctos populos* from 28 February 380 (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.1.2): all non-Nicene Christians were to be considered "demented and insane" heretics. A year later the Council of Constantinople adopted the so-called Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and affirmed the Council of Nicaea. In retrospect, the council of 381 was considered ecumenical since 451.

Church councils became a common tool for settling matters of doctrine and tackling institutional problems as well. Compromises were not possible but conciliary rulings required uniform and unanimous support from all bishops present (MacMullen 2006). Bishops who dissented were therefore at least deposed but more often condemned and thereby excluded from the Church. The fifth century and its councils brought forth some of the best-known saints and heretics of late antiquity: Cyril, bishop of Alexandria (412–444), champion of the Council of Ephesus in 431 and cornerstone of orthodoxy in the Roman and Byzantine empire; and Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (428–431) and condemned heretic after 431 (Wessel 2004).

The fifth-century controversy over questions of the divine and human nature of Christ mattered particularly in the Near East as the Christological controversy led here not only to unrest but also to division and finally to the establishment of independent churches that still exist today: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church, etc. The development was not linear but allegiances could change in the Near Eastern provinces throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. Syria, Osrhoene, and Mesopotamia seem to have been strongly dyophysite until sometime after the Council of Ephesus. The condemned Nestorius, the "New Judas" (Bevan 2016), came from here and was a pupil of Theodore of Mopsuestia (392–428), one of the leading dyophysite theologians in late antiquity and revered until today by the Assyrian Church of the East as "interpreter" (McLeod 2008). A letter collection (*Collectio Casinensis*) from the immediate years after the Council of Ephesus shows

the strong support that Nestorius and dyophysite Christology had among the bishops in these regions. However, this changed over the next three generations, and when Emperor Justin I (518–527) came to power, Osrhoene and Mesopotamia, and partially also Syria proved to be strongholds of miaphysitism.

Palestine shows the opposite development, changing from a region in which Egyptian-miaphysite influence was strong into a region in which the monks adopted the dyophysite creed that particularly Pope Leo (440–461) had shaped at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (Price and Gaddis 2005). After the council, miaphysite monks rioted against the bishop of Jerusalem, Juvenal, who had agreed to the Chalcedonian formula of faith. Roman troops quelled the uprising, but they did not erase the opposition at once. It seems that still in the second half of the fifth century at least southern Palestine was a stronghold of the non-Chalcedonians if we can trust the image that John Rufus, non-Chalcedonian author and bishop of Maiuma, painted of the area in his works (Steppa 2005).

When Emperor Justin changed Anastasius's (491–518) religious policy of least tolerating if not favoring the non-Chalcedonians and agreed to a church union with the dyophysite papacy in 518, more than fifty non-Chalcedonian bishops from Mesopotamia and eastern Syria left their sees. Throughout the reign of Justin and his successor Justinian I (527–565) non-Chalcedonian Christians and communities (especially monks and monasteries) were discriminated against and partially persecuted. At this time the religious landscape of Palestine changed in favor of the supporters of the Council of Chalcedon: it became a destination for ascetics from around the empire and beyond who settled here. These international ascetics were predominantly Chalcedonian, and their main internal doctrinal threat was not miaphysitism but rather the return of Origenist ideas (Binns 1994, 183–217). Going back to Origen (185–254), probably the most influential and most controversial early Christian thinker, the rise of Origenism in the sixth century was sufficiently alarming that Emperor Justinian and the fifth ecumenical council in Constantinople in 553 attended to it.

However, the main focus of the Council of Constantinople in 553 remained the Christological controversy (introduction and translation in Price 2009). In the decade leading up to this council, Emperor Justinian was a driving force behind the condemnation of the so-called Three Chapters: following Justinian the council then condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia as a person, and some writings of Theodoret, dyophysite bishop of Cyrrhus (423–455/460) and an infamous letter of Ibas, dyophysite bishop of Edessa (435–457). The result of the council, however, was not a reconciliation with the miaphysite non-Chalcedonians. They would have expected a condemnation of the Council of Chalcedon, not just the purge of a few prominent dyophysite theologians. At the same time, the council caused severe resistance in the West, and it took several generations before the council was generally accepted by Latin Christianity.

In the Eastern Roman Empire, the Christological controversy continued, particularly among Chalcedonians (Lange 2012). The controversy over Christ's natures led in the seventh century in the time of Emperor Heraclius (610–641) to questions of his energies and wills—the monenergism-monotheletism controversy—but no lasting agreement could be reached (Tannous 2014). The non-Chalcedonian groups, communities, and emerging churches came now under Muslim rule, and thereby also gained political independence from the Byzantine church.

The Spread of Christianity and Its Centers in the Near East

Introducing her study on Palestine in late antiquity, Hagith Sivan rightly emphasized that Christians "were negligible in size at the dawn of the fourth century" (Sivan 2008, 3).

Christianity's development from a discriminated against and partially persecuted community to being "state religion" at the end of the fourth century did not instantly make it the majority religion even in the region of its origin. The Near East was not only the cradle of Christianity but of many cults and religions, and their interactions and reciprocal influences were extensive. However, despite long scholarly traditions and interests in particularly the religious history of the region, "no comprehensive, monographic treatment of the history of religion in Syria exists" as scholars of early Christianity have pointed out recently (Phenix and Horn 2017, cxxxix). The same holds true for the adjacent regions; the focus here will be here on a few significant developments of the Christian communities.

The process of Christianization in the Near East was uneven: cities like Antioch in Syria or Edessa in the Osrhoene had Christian communities from early on. Other cities and particularly the countryside in some regions remained "pagan" almost until the end of antiquity. However, the spread of Christianity in general remains difficult to reconstruct as detailed narrative sources are missing. The Christian community in Antioch can already be traced back to the New Testament as the place where Christians were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). But how Christianity arrived in Edessa, for example, is contested: Did the Apostle Thomas come here and preach the gospel, or did he send Addai? The evidence is unclear as different traditions (*Acts of Thomas* versus Eusebius *Church History* and the later *Teaching of Addai*) conflict with each other. It is also possible that Christianity in Edessa emerged from Jewish circles (Bundy 2007; see Wood 2010). Also highly debated has been the historicity of the *Chronicle of Arbela* which a hundred years ago was regarded as a crucial source for the earliest Christianization of Adiabene. Adolf von Harnack for example considered it "a unique document for the oldest oriental missionary history" (von Harnack 1924, 684). However, later scholars were more critical up to the judgment that its editor Alphonse Mingana invented the text. Today it seems that the *opinio communis* considers the *Chronicle* a later medieval source without any historical value (Kettenhofen 1995).

There was not one Christianity that evolved but several Christianities. This not only refers to "gentile Christianity" and "Jewish Christianity" of the early days but also applies for the period of late antiquity. No "orthodox" Christianity simply existed alongside heretical and semi-Christian groups (like Manichaeans etc.), rather the definition of orthodox Christianity was fiercely debated—and changed over time. For example, Ephrem the Syrian, whose later influence for several Christian traditions cannot be overstated, represented at his own time only one branch of Christianity. In fact, Nicene Christians may not have been the largest Christian group in either Nisibis or Edessa at the time. Ephrem's hymns against heretics as well as some of his other works show him and Nicene Christianity in competition not only with "Arians" but also Bardaisanite Christians, referring back to Bardaisan (154–222), a Christian philosopher at the royal court at Edessa. Another influential Christian group in Syria and Mesopotamia were the Valentinians, named after Valentinus, a second-century Christian philosopher who founded his school in Rome. Like the Bardaisanites, the Valentinians are often considered "gnostics." The problems evolving from this terminology and the discussions in scholarship cannot be laid out here (see King 2003), but these groups indicate the broad range of Christianities and semi-Christianities in late antiquity. Bishops (and theologians) at the time desperately attempted to establish firm boundaries for their communities by demonizing other groups as heretics.

In this regard Judaism, too, seems to have posed a serious problem. As Christianity shared the same religious inheritance with Judaism, it comes as no surprise that Christian leaders saw a particular need to prove that their religion had now superseded Judaism. Christianity claimed that Christ had instituted the New Covenant as part of the Eucharist, and with the Roman

destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in the first century, Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24–27) together with Christ's saying (Matthew 24:2) had supposedly been fulfilled. Julian the Apostate's short reign received lasting repercussions in Christian literature not least because he supposedly intended to rebuild the Jewish Temple. Ephrem explicitly referred to Julian as having denied Daniel (*Hymns against Julian* 1.20). If successful, this would have undermined Christianity's claim to have taken up the place of Judaism.

Although Julian failed to have the Jewish Temple rebuilt, and despite increasing legal discrimination since the fifth century, Judaism attracted Christians to participate in some of their religious festivities. John Chrysostom's *Orations against the Jews*, preached in Antioch in the second half of the fourth century, were rather orations against "Judaizing Christians." John attempted to set a clear-cut boundary for his community members as he regarded Christian participation in Jewish festivals as a theological problem (Wilken 1983, 148–160).

Anti-Jewish sentiments as well as polemics against Jews became common in Christian literature, and maybe even "an expected part of Christian identity, at least for some Syrian and Mesopotamian populations" (Wood 2010, 107). At the same time, Jewish life was well established in cities like Antioch, and archaeological evidence proves a flourishing Jewish life in Palestine. For Judaism, the destruction of the Temple certainly was a far-reaching and traumatic event, but in no way did it end Jewish religious life. For Christian theological self-definition, however, it seems to have been foundational as Christian reactions to Julian's failed enterprise indicate. In the fourth century Christians were still a minority among the population, and John Chrysostom's claim to be the true religion (in contrast to Jews and Greek philosophies) was needed as self-assurance.

Scholars have tried to estimate how many Christians may have lived, for example, in Antioch in the time of John Chrysostom. An estimate of half of the population may be too optimistic, even in a city that had a community of Jesus followers from earliest times. However, exact numbers for ancient populations and their religious affiliations are not possible, and a certain number would still not say much about the degree of Christianization. As John Chrysostom's polemics prove, not all his community members were as Christian as the preacher wished, and such ambiguities in religious affiliations need to be accounted for in an analysis of the question of Christianization.

Over the next two hundred years, Christianity spread beyond cities and entered remoter places in the countryside. In the sixth century, John, non-Chalcedonian author and titular bishop of Ephesus, narrates the story of Simeon the Mountaineer who entered a village in the countryside west of the Euphrates, and inquired if the inhabitants were Jews or Christians. The villagers were offended that someone would even think that they might be Jews and insisted they were Christians. However, at the same time they had no idea what the Eucharist was (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 16). Simeon supposedly settled in one of these villages, cleaned the church, and started to reevangelize those Christians who proudly identified themselves as Christians but who had not seen any Christian community life within their own generation.

In some places, traditional cults may also have played a role for a longer time although their cult practices and sacrifices started to be banned by imperial law since the fourth century. In Heliopolis/Baalbek in today's Lebanon, Constantine may have built a church, but no archaeological traces remain. More than half a century later, Emperor Theodosius I is said to have destroyed the major temple and to have built another church. Nevertheless, Baalbek remained famous for its "paganism" in late antiquity as the fifth-century hagiography of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa (412–435), shows:

since the desire of confessorship was in his heart like a hot fire, he set out and took with him the blessed Eusebius, and the two of them traveled to Baalbek, a city of pagans. They went up in their godly zeal to the temple of their idols in order to smash them and be esteemed worthy of martyrdom. For [Rabbula and Eusebius] had not gone there in the expectation of returning alive but in the hope that they would torture them, kill them, and through their murder make [Rabbula and Eusebius] martyrs. (Phenix and Horn 2017, 25–27)

However, the citizens of Baalbek only beat up the two troublemakers and threw them down the staircase (of the Jupiter temple?). The two Christians were proud of their wounds, and Rabbula returned to Edessa where he became bishop shortly afterward.

While the city of Alexandria was notorious for violent confrontations, religious violence was also common throughout Palestine and Syria where Christian monks supposedly destroyed synagogues and temples (see Gaddis 2005; Hahn and Menze 2020). Nevertheless, the destruction of cult places certainly remained the exception (Caseau 1999). Traditional cults were probably more often abandoned *peu à peu*. When Julian the Apostate visited the famous Apollo temple in Daphne near Antioch for its major festival, he was appalled that only one priest sacrificed a goose while the emperor had imagined large parts of the population of Antioch would participate. But it would be rash to assume that as soon as such civic cults lost their attraction and function, the whole population turned Christian. Still in the sixth century John of Ephesus claimed to have converted eighty thousand pagans in the hinterland of Ephesus in Asia Minor.

The Christian Landscape: Asceticism, Pilgrimage, and the "Holy Land"

While the spatially inclusive and comprehensive Christianization of the Roman Empire took centuries, the new religion spearheaded a development that proved to be extremely dynamic and long lasting: Christian asceticism and monasticism. Christians did not invent asceticism but the widespread acceptance and rapid institutionalization of it proves its significance for the late antique church. This was particularly the case in the Near East as the doctrinal controversies can only be understood against the background of eastern monastic traditions and the fact that church leaders were often recruited from among ascetics and monks. In contrast to the western parts of the empire, many of the leading bishops and theologians here had ascetic and monastic experience before they were ordained bishops.

The forms of asceticism varied greatly—from region to region but also within a certain region its form was not uniform. Early Christian ascetics continued to live in their own homes but abstained from certain activities (sexual intercourse, certain types of food, etc.); anchorites left their homes and settled alone in their wilderness, and cenobites chose to be part of a communal, monastic setting with other, like-minded fellows—with men and women strictly separated (for an encompassing and impressive analysis, see Brown 1988). Samuel Rubenson detailed these categories further and offered a sophisticated typology: (a) monks attached to a church or shrine; (b) members of an ascetic household; (c) itinerant monks without any habitation of their own; (d) recluses or hermits, isolated in cells within or outside a monastery; (e) anchorites living in cells, usually a master and disciples often clustered in larger groups; and (f) cenobites, that is monks who live in a centrally organized monastery (Rubenson 2007, 643–647). Obviously, some ascetics may not fit this classification scheme, and others also switched between different categories.

One general development can be observed throughout the Near East: the tendency and keen interest of the official church to institutionalize and regulate monastic life. Particularly

some of the itinerant monks caused disturbances as they showed up in groups and did not hesitate to break the law if they considered their actions to be pious. The *Life of Barsauma* (probably fifth century) is a good example of such a violent itinerant monk who together with his disciples disturbed urban centers particularly in Palestine and used violence against non-Christian communities by destroying synagogues or temples, etc. (Menze 2016 and Hahn and Menze 2020). The Council of Chalcedon in 451 issued several canons on monastic life that attempted to get a grip on this problem and to establish unquestionable episcopal jurisdiction over monasteries and monks. Monks were not supposed to leave their monastery, and also no person was allowed to just found a monastery without the explicit permission of the local bishop. It is notable that also those Christian communities and church traditions that opposed the doctrinal formula of the council adopted these canons.

However, while these canons show the need for regulation, their recognition and enforcement were not a given. In the sixth century John of Ephesus narrated the lives of Addai and Abraham who considered it their godly task in life to found monasteries, attract members, and coach some of these monks in how to run the place. Then Addai and Abraham would move on and establish another convent (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 22). Overall, they founded twelve monasteries in twenty-five years. Nothing is said about the bishop's license for these monasteries, and considering the general ecclesiastical unrest in this period, it seems unlikely that a Chalcedonian bishop approved monasteries founded by non-Chalcedonian monks. Bishops continued to have difficulties in enforcing their power over monasteries, but monasteries were also not always institutions that lasted for long. Sometimes even the founder may have outlived his monastery or monasteries if the community disagreed on certain issues, split up, and left the monastery deserted (for Syrian monasticism, see Escolan 1999).

However, some Near Eastern monasteries and monastic landscapes survived the times: the Saint Catherine Monastery on the Sinai may be the most prominent example. It was founded in the time of Emperor Justinian but still functions as a monastery today and has been made a UNESCO world heritage site. In Lebanon, not a single monastery but a whole valley, the Qadisha ("holy") valley, was added to the UNESCO world heritage sites. The valley has functioned as a refuge for Christians since antiquity, and some of its monasteries that belong to the Maronite Church are still in use today.

Severus of Antioch, non-Chalcedonian patriarch 512–518 and revered saint in the Syriac Orthodox tradition, compared the hill of Mardin with Mount Zion. Mardin is in the Tūr ʿAbdīn, that is, "The Mountain of the Servants [of God]," in southeastern Turkey, and the Syriac Orthodox consider Tūr ʿAbdīn to be their "holy mountain" with its many churches, monasteries, but also caves in which hermits and non-Chalcedonian refugees lived throughout the persecutions of the sixth century.

The most famous sacralized landscape of the Near East remains, of course, Palestine, the proverbial "Holy Land." The term Holy Land has been used in Jewish writings since the second century bc (Wilken 1992, 24–27), and the Christian Justin Martyr also knew of it in the second century ad. However, only in the Middle Ages does the term become commonly used. As cradle of Christianity, the Holy Land became the focus of a Christian building program under Emperor Constantine, and over the next two centuries, the religious landscape of the region changed completely. Jerusalem, which had been a "non-city" (Elsner 2000, 189) after the Jewish city was destroyed by the Romans, became a Christian metropolis, adorned with churches and hostels for pilgrims who visited the holy places. Monasticism grew rapidly, particularly in the Judaean desert south and east of Jerusalem (Hirschfeld 1992), because many monks from all over the empire and beyond wanted to settle here.

In late antiquity, Christian pilgrims also visited Jerusalem and the holy places; pilgrims already came here before Constantine but with the Christianization of the empire, the influx of pilgrims grew exponentially (in general, see Hunt 1982). The first report by a pilgrim that survives stems from the time of Constantine (the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*) but several more pilgrim accounts have come down to us. Often pilgrims to the Holy Land also extended their travels in order to visit non-biblical sites. Rubenson speaks of "ascetic tourism" (Rubenson 2007, 649) concerning visitors who went to the desert fathers in Egypt, but also ascetics in other regions were asked for advice in legal matters, matters of health, conversions, etc. Some ascetics became so famous that they may be considered Christian "rock-stars" of the ancient world. Simeon Stylites, the first ascetic, who stood on a pillar for several decades (from around 420 to the time of his death in 459), offers the most prominent example (Doran 1992). Already in his lifetime, people from the region came to see him, but after his death his fame grew beyond the border of the Roman Empire. In the second half of the fifth century an impressive church and pilgrimage center were built with imperial money at Qal'at Sim'an, close to Aleppo, where Simeon had stood on his pillar.

Another pilgrimage center in the desert close to the Persian border, some 25 km south of the Euphrates, was Resafa. In the pre-Christian Roman Empire, it had hardly been more than an outpost but since the fifth century, it became a major pilgrimage center (Key Fowden 1999). According to the *Passion of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus*, the Christian soldier Sergius died here as a martyr and was buried. Veneration only started long after his death, but a soldier saint may have enjoyed particular popularity in the frontier zone, and consequently Resafa was renamed Sergiopolis. In the sixth century, this pilgrimage center was even elevated to the status of metropolis, and its closeness to both Arab vassal tribes as well as the Persian border, enhanced it political importance. Both Arab kings and the Sasanian king of kings made endowments and donations to the famous saint. The veneration of Sergius did not stop with the Muslim conquest in the seventh century but the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik built his favorite residence here (Gussone and Sack 2017). Resafa and also Qal'at Sim'an only disappeared as pilgrimage centers sometime in the High Middle Ages although their status must have been reduced long before that.

Conclusions: From the Imperial Church to Medieval Churches

The late antique Near East was culturally diverse and pluralistic (see Fowden 1993). For most of antiquity, Christianity remained only one among many religions and cults. With the Constantinian turn and Theodosius's edict *Cunctos populos* Christians did not immediately constitute a majority among the population. After Christianity started to dominate the religious discourse, on the ground, in its communities, it received a regional shaping and local outlook. Being a universal religion did not equate to being uniform throughout the whole Mediterranean. At the same time, Christianity as a religion requested its followers accept only the Christian God as true God, and eventually instituted imperial Christianity as orthodoxy on the subjects of the Roman Empire. Thereby Christianity became a major marker of identity for the subjects of the Roman Empire by the end of antiquity.

This imperial character is also visible in the ecclesiastical organization of the church: most ecclesiastical provinces were organized along the lines of the administration of the Roman Empire. Bishops took over administrative roles for their communities and gained local and regional influence. For example, throughout the Persian wars in the sixth century, bishops acted as representatives of their cities, negotiated with the Persian king of kings, and

organized the ransom of hostages when necessary. Jerusalem and the "Holy Land" certainly posed a special case in the development of the Church in the Near East. Jerusalem became the fifth patriarchate (after Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Rome) not because of its imperial or administrative importance but because of its religious significance. Similarly, Jerusalem and the Holy Land's economic boom and the international character of monasticism were due to their sacralized status.

With Christianity's triumph as favored imperial religion, however, internal quarrels and the quest for orthodoxy also ran like a common thread through its history in late antiquity. In the Near East, groups whose doctrinal perspectives did not find majorities at ecumenical councils, resisted and started to form their own churches by the end of antiquity. The Christological divisions after 431 and particularly after 451 ultimately caused the establishment of independent churches throughout the following centuries. The Council of Ephesus in 431 was not recognized by Christians in Persia and led in the fifth and sixth centuries to an independent Persian Church that is today known as the Assyrian Church of the East. The Council of Chalcedon was in retrospect the break-up point for Armenians, Copts, and Syriac Orthodox Christians who no longer accepted this or any following "ecumenical" councils. Being discriminated against and partially persecuted in the cases of Egyptian and Syrian non-Chalcedonian Christians in the sixth and seventh centuries under Roman rule made them far from nostalgic about the imperial past. For these Near Eastern Christian churches, late antiquity was the formative as well as heroic period in which their churches gained their independence.

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REGIONS AND PLACES

CHAPTER 26

URBANIZATION AND CITIES IN THE HELLENISTIC A ND ROMAN NEAR EAST

OLYMPIA BOBOU AND RUBINA RAJA

Introduction

Cities have always fascinated scholars. They were studied long before the scholarship of Max Weber (the study of cities often fell under philosophy before Weber: see Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1628), or economy: see Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776); Friedrich Engels's *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (1845); while Marx was influenced by him, his discussion of the city's impact on the working classes was brief: see Katznelson (1993, 32–36)), who with his then revolutionizing "Die Stadt" in numerous ways set an agenda that still has a strong impact on urban studies today (Weber 192 1; see also Pirenne 1925; Febvre and Bataillion 1925; Braudel 1998; for criticisms of Weber's "orientalism," see Hansen 2000, 602–604; Luz 2014, 13). It cannot be ignored that cities as a central expression of human organization over the course of several millennia have been and still are a driving factor in the way the world works. Today more than half of the globe's population live in cities (Ritchie and Roser 2018; Raja and Sindbæk 2020, 10–11; Raja and Sind bæk 2022a) and this number only rises.

The urbanization of Hellenistic and Roman Syria and the Near East has long been a topic of research, and a range of scholarship has appeared, also in recent years, on the development of cities and settlements in a *longue durée* perspective (i.e., Liebeschuetz 2001; Lewin 2005; also see Woolf 2020). The region was vast, diverse in all aspects, and a pivotal factor was the infrastructure in the region: its extent and coherence, or interruptions and changes (see Pažout, chapter 17, this volume), as well as, of course, the obvious influence that military instability would have had on the way regions and places could communicate with each other or were connected. It is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of urbanization in the region, due to the state of the evidence and also to the amount of evidence; but it is also important to recognize that addressing urbanization remains a crucial focus if we are to push boundaries for how to study this vast and complex region. The key to understanding the limitations to creating an overarching narrative lies precisely in the complexity of the region—in terms of understanding the archaeological and historical evidence that is available to us.

Much work has been done on estimating the numbers of cities and settlements as well as the sizes of these—varying over time—(see Ortman and Cooper 2021; Nol 2021; Taylor 2021; Raja and Sindbæk 2021; Hanson 2021; 2022). Much of this, of course, remains hypothetical, but still underlines the importance of trying to think harder and in a more hard data way about the complex developments and mechanisms in place (see Ortman et al. 2020; Sindbæk 2022; Kim and McAnany 2023). Only in such ways do we see with greater clarity where the data are not available and which pitfalls we are confronted with when studying urbanization in the region.

We have no firm estimations about just how many people lived in the region from the Hellenistic period until the end of the Roman period. What we do have an idea about, however, is how populations fluctuated and cities changed size over time, if we judge from the dating—

both absolutely and relative—of monuments and urban space sizes as, for example, shown in Hanson (2022) for the Roman period. That is not only because some of the sites were continuously occupied from the Neolithic period but also because of the region's geopolitical importance: it links three continents; it has good, fertile lands and livable steppe deserts; and it is also where the three major Abrahamic religions started. This made the region the location of numerous battles and population movements, sometimes forced.

The Development of the Region

Ancient Syria and the Near East benefited from a varied landscape and a benign climate (see Seland, chapter 4, this volume). These factors put the region at one end of the "Fertile Crescent" that was at the forefront of the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture (Barker 2006; Zeder 2008), leading to the development of early densely populated settlements (Childe 1950; Bonine 1977, 141–142; Matthews et al. 2020, 1–18). While there is a debate whether these Neolithic settlements could be called cities (Hole 2002), scholars agree that from the fourth millennium BC onward, various settlements emerged that fulfill the different criteria for cities (for the debate on what is a city, see Smith 2020), with Uruk considered the first mega-city of the wider region (for an overview on early urbanism in the region, see Düring 2014; Scott 2017; see also Pollock 2001; Liverani, Bahrani, and Van de Mieroop 2006; Crüsemann et al. 2013; Van De Mieroop 2016, esp. 21–40; Podany 2022, 13–36; Raja and Sindbæk 2022b; White and Fletcher 2023). Systematic excavations and surveys have revealed numerous urban centers whose inhabitants exploited the opportunities for multiregional trade and that developed into states that engaged in warfare for the control of resources and trade routes, since the region is at the point where three continents meet (Rostovtzeff 1935; Podany 2022, 421–428).

From the period of the conquest of these smaller political entities by the Assyrian Empire, during the eighth and the seventh centuries bc, there was a shift toward the construction of palatial-administrative centers, with Assur the oldest of them. These cities, however, cannot be understood without their surrounding landscapes, and the creation of low-density settlements around a palatial administrative center that occupied large areas in the landscape seems to have been taken over by the Achaemenids, who conquered the region next (see Novák 2004; Kühne 2011; Harmanşah 2012; Osborne 2015; Otto 2015; Gondet 2018; see also Fletcher, White, and Dharmendra 2022; Raja and Sindbæk 2023 for the phenomenon of low-density large settlements). Alexander's conquest and the carving up of the region by his Seleucid and Ptolemaic successors, with the Seleucids controlling the majority of Syria and the Near East, led to a different pattern of urbanization, with the focus shifting from a model incorporating landscapes and urban structures to one of cities following the Greek *polis* model, lacking urban landscapes and gardens, and often named after their founder (see Cohen 2006; Capdetrey 2007; Blömer 2020, 139; but see also Ma 2024 on what constitutes a Greek polis).

The picture, however, can only be painted in broad strokes, and in places the tableau must be left empty; there is little archaeological evidence for much of the region, with information often coming from textual evidence that records names of cities whose location is now either unknown or debated. While in some areas, the urban centers seem to have sprung up *ex nihilo*, leading Fergus Millar to write of cultural "amnesia" in the region (Millar 1993, 6), in others, there is evidence for continuous occupation and cult practices (Kaizer 2022, 3). While Millar referred to loss of continuity from the distant past to the Roman period, the lack of evidence from the earlier Hellenistic period has also led him to suggest that Syria and the Near East were not urbanized—and have left little evidence in general (Millar 1993, 22). Maurice

Sartre, however, has argued that the evidence from later periods hints at the changes that happened during the first centuries of Greek occupation (Sartre 2001, 13–14). Thus, the debate about the urbanization of the region has concentrated on two schools of thought: one that suggests continuity, and a *longue durée* perspective, and one proposing that cultural "amnesia" caused cities and settlements to develop without references to their long past. Recent archaeological work in the region seems to support the thesis put forward by Sartre and confirm that the region was more urbanized than thought earlier (see Bobou and Raja, chapter 43, this volume; Bobou, chapter 35, this volume).

The Hellenistic Period

Getzel M. Cohen (2006) gathered the evidence for all the Hellenistic settlements in Syria and they can be divided into (1) new foundations, and (2) cities that were already established and that were turned into "colonies," or were refounded by Hellenistic rulers. The geographical diversity of the region as well as the presence of numerous different people with their own customs, beliefs, and languages also mean that the top-down decision to found a new city or colony was met with different degrees of acceptance (Sartre 2001, 13–14; 2008, 37). Especially in the Roman period, the use of Greek culture was a marker of elite identity (Sartre 2008, 49), something that, if one accepts Sartre's use of Roman evidence for uncovering past practices, must have also applied in the Hellenistic period.

Most of the cities founded by Alexander were located beyond the Tigris and often were named after him (for the debate on the number and names of cities, see Cohen 2013, 35–38). One of the few cities in Syria whose foundation was attributed to Alexander, was Alexandreia by Issos. The ancient city is close to the modern one of Iskenderun but has not been located yet, and so its location cannot be proven archaeologically: it is just as likely that the city was founded by one of his successors (Cohen 2006, 73–76). The case of Alexandreia by Issos is typical of the situation of many of the urban centers of Hellenistic Syria and the Near East: their early Hellenistic phases are known mainly or exclusively through texts, and the sites themselves have not been identified. Another city whose foundation is associated with Alexander is Antioch on the Orontes, although this may have been a legend aimed to glorify the city; it is more likely that it was founded by one of his successors, perhaps Seleukos I. While the location of the city is known (under modern Antakya), the constant habitation, the numerous destructions (some natural, some caused by people), and rebuilding of the site have eradicated most traces of its earlier urban development and planning, and evidence from the Roman phases is considered as evidence for the Hellenistic city too—for example, the Roman city's grid plan (see Cohen 2006, 80–93). This situation is typical for many of the Hellenistic settlements in Syria (see also Daubner 2011).

A third case is that of cities with evidence of "Hellenism" (as Bowersock 1990, 9 defines it) but whose names elude us. One such city is Jebel Khalid in northern Syria. The excavations revealed a fortified city that had a grid plan, a "palace" organized around a Doric peristyle courtyard with two reception rooms, a gymnasium, and a temple with acrolithic statues in the Greek style, all pointing toward a military outpost that developed into a prosperous town. The width of the temple and the inner tripartite division of the cella, however, as well as the architecture of the so-called market building show the use of local knowledge and traditions (for evidence of pre-Hellenistic occupation in Jebel-Khalid, see Mottram 2013; for the site, see recently Clarke et al. 2016; Raja 2022a, 131).

Another city that demonstrates how new cities founded in the Hellenistic Near East differed from the traditional model of the Greek *polis* was Ai Khanoum in modern Afghanistan. It is another city whose ancient name is not known and whose history, based on the archaeological evidence, shows that it was founded during the reign of either Seleukos I (r. 305–281 bc) or his son Antiochos I (r. 281–261 bc). It was gradually expanded, was renamed Eucratideia after the king of Bactria Eucratides (r. 172/171–145 bc), and was slowly abandoned with the fall of the Greek Bactrian kingdom. Scholars agree that the earliest building in the city is a tomb that must have belonged to one of its founders, Kineas, according to the Greek custom that allowed a town's founders or heroes to be buried within its city walls. Ai Khanoum had a gymnasium (fig. 26.1), a theater, a palace, a temple, and an open-air sanctuary, and was protected mainly by geographical features (hills and rivers) but also by fortifications. The city, however, did not have a grid plan and it seems to have been divided between a densely built and occupied residential sector and the "palace area" with its monumental buildings and only forty large elite houses. The architecture of the individual buildings, the open-air sanctuary, the location of "Treasuries" next to the palace, and the large, open spaces point toward Achaemenid practices (for its history and archaeology, see Martinez-Sève 2020, 222–225; Lecuyot 2020). This phenomenon of the simultaneous presence of Greek and local features and buildings has been described as "eclectic" (Martinez-Sève 2015, 281) or "hybrid" (Grenet 2022, 12). It is interesting to note that this was not only a Seleucid practice, but the Parthians did the same in their capital Nisa, indicating a flow of cultural exchanges between the two empires (see Raja 2022a; for Nisa, see Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume).

FIGURE 26.1. Gymnasium of Ai-Khanoum. Photo © MNAAG, Paris, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Image Musée Guimet.

In addition to towns, Alexander also founded colonies populated by Macedonian settlers. The earliest of these seems to have been Samareia, based on the written sources (Cohen 2006, 23; *contra*: Gonzalez and Mendoza 2020). Samareia was destroyed multiple times in the Hellenistic and Roman period, with the result that only parts of the fortification can be dated to the early Hellenistic period (Cohen 2006, 274–277). The case of Samareia is typical of the complex history of the sites: apart from the people punished for their rebellion against Alexander III, it seems that the rest of the local population remained in Samareia and was forced to accept the presence of the settlers—and their practices (Berlin 2018; Gonzalez and Mendoza 2020, 170). Thus, even though it is called a "colony" in the written sources, in practice, it was a city with two distinct populations, each with their own religious and possibly also educational centers, but all under the same administration.

The Roman Period

By the time that Pompey and Octavian had fully incorporated Syria and the Near East into the Roman Empire, the Seleucid Empire had been greatly reduced, while the kingdoms that were on its borders were allied to the Romans (see Andrade and Raja, chapter 13, this volume; Bobou and Raja, chapter 14, this volume). Despite the political and military upheavals, the cities continued to thrive as recipients of local and imperial munificence. In fact, the urban tradition was so developed in the region that the Romans only established a few colonies, such as Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus founded by Augustus (modern Beirut; not a new city but on the site of an earlier Persian settlement: Butcher 2003, 112; see also Millar 1993, 36, 279–285), or refounded already existing cities, like those of the Decapolis (Sartre 2001, 640–649; see also Dąbrowa 2012).

Antioch on the Orontes, together with Apameia, Laodikeia, and Seleuceia in Pieria, was one of the cities of the Tetrapolis (see recently Bousdroukis 2022). By the time of its annexation, it had become one of the Seleucid capitals and remained one of the most important cities of the region, patronized by the emperors, starting with Caesar and the Julio-Claudians, who paid for the construction of theaters, temples, an aqueduct, colonnaded streets, and other buildings necessary for the magnificence and quality of life in the city. Herod I of Judaea also sponsored the construction of a colonnaded street (Jos., *BJ* 1.425), possibly to show the geographic extent of his influence, his wealth, and his support of Roman imperial interests in the wider region. The material culture remains from the city almost all date from this period onward. The wealth of its citizens is also reflected in the houses of the suburb of Daphne.

The urban landscape, the decoration of the houses, and the objects used in everyday life (Antioch was one of the major centers of production of *terra sigillata*: see Bes 2015 in passim), were similar to what one would encounter in cities of the Roman Empire in Italy. There were differences, however, that marked Antioch as different, and this mixture of local and "international," "Roman" elements is typical of Roman-period urbanism, a phenomenon that has been described also as "glocalization" (for Roman Antioch, see among others, Millar 1993, in passim; Kondoleon 2000; for glocalization, see de Jong 2017, 175–216). Antioch, for example, had the first colonnaded street, a feature that was imitated in cities in Asia Minor and North Africa, but remained typical of Roman cities in Syria and the Near East, constructed in Apamea, Palmyra, Gerasa, and Bostra (modern Bosra) (Yegül and Favro 2019, 712–717).

In addition to these region-specific architectural forms, temples especially combined Greek, Roman, and local structures, layouts, and embellishments in the same building to different extents—from Herod's temple, constructed using Roman techniques, adhering to Judaic

traditions in its layout, and topped by a Roman eagle (see esp. Netzer 2006, 137–178), to the temple of Bel in Palmyra whose architect was inspired by the work of the Hellenistic architect Hermogenes, but also included tripartite shrines and typical embellishments for the Near East (see recently Gawlikowski 2021, 113–128; in general, see Butcher 2013; Segal 2013) (fig. 26.2).

FIGURE 26.2. Palmyra, Temple of Bel. Image © Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar.

Another major difference was linguistic: while the official language of the eastern part of the Roman Empire was Greek, which was used in public documents and inscriptions, the population spoke different Semitic languages and dialects. It has been argued that this was a difference between urban and rural populations (Butcher 2003, 30), but this prioritizes written evidence that has survived over oral that did not (see Butcher 2003, 283–289: he discusses inscriptions and literary texts). Sartre, however, emphasizes that the use of Greek did not eliminate local languages and argues that the rapid adoption of Arabic in the region is evidence of how little Greek was used outside the sphere of official documents (2001, in passim but esp. 882).

The coexistence of different cultural and material elements in the region was not new to the Roman period; however, it is mostly when discussing it within the context of the Roman Empire that the notion of resistance becomes important to scholars (a notable exception being Jewish resistance to Antiochus IV—see recently Eliav 2021, 271–273; see also Kosmin 2014 for Babylon). It has been suggested that adherence to local religions and their expressions through the use of local architectural forms and elements was an active point of resistance to what was perceived as a deliberate attempt to Romanize the region through public institutions and buildings either by the imperial government or the elites (see esp. Richardson 2002 for resistance; see Burns 2011 and 2017 for the use of colonnaded streets as a marker of allegiance to Rome; see also Brélaz 2021 for the appeal of local identity versus Roman

citizenship). This argument, however, does not take into account that the same persons responsible for the "resistance monuments" were also involved in the construction of public buildings (Herod's building activities are a good example of that: Raja 2022a, 131–132). Clearly, the situation on the ground was much more complex than can simply be expressed as "Greek," "Roman," "local resistance," or "local adaptation" in scholarship.

Late Antiquity

The brief reign of Zenobia and her son (r. 267–272) united Syria and the Near East, making them part of the Palmyrene empire (see Raja 2022b, 87–116). The second time the region was united was under Diocletian (r. 284–305). Even though he divided Syria and the Near East into several provinces, these were all under the command of the *vicarius* (he was replaced by a *comes* from 325) of Oriens, whose headquarters were at Antioch on the Orontes (Jones 1986, 105, 281, 374). That means that for the duration of late antiquity—a long period whose boundaries have shifted numerous times in scholarly literature, and whose assessment varies whether one studies the western or the eastern part of the Roman Empire (Marcone 2020)—the region remained united administratively and fiscally.

It also knew prosperity: this is evident from the material remains from the major cities such as Antioch and its suburb Daphne, Apameia, Seleuceia in Pieria, Tyre, Sidon, Berytus, Damascus, and also from cities like Palmyra, that had been devastated in ad 273 when Aurelian crushed the revolt of Antiochos, who succeeded Zenobia (for Syria, see Drijvers 1994; for the cities, see Kennedy 1985; Avni 2011; Liebeschuetz 2015; Ward 2020). The evidence from them also shows how the fabric of cities changed: while works of infrastructure and fortifications continued to be maintained and renovated, especially after natural disasters, it is debatable to what extent theaters, gymnasia, and other such public spaces were maintained in the various cities. After all, spectacles and public nudity were against Christian morals. Even bathing complexes, that were to remain a salient feature of urban life, changed form: late antique baths tend to be smaller in size, with numerous, smaller rooms and a larger hot room (Kennedy 1985, 8–10 proposes that reduced size indicated that their use as meeting places was diminished compared to their importance as places to wash; Kowalewska 2021, 127–128 attributes the change in size to changes in settlement patterns).

The adoption of Christianity as the religion of the empire necessitated new places of worship: in some cases, temples were converted to churches (for example, the temples of Baalshamin and Bel at Palmyra); in others, new buildings were constructed specifically for the needs of the Christian communities (again, using Palmyra as an example: four new churches were constructed in the city near the Great Colonnade: for Palmyra in late antiquity, see Intagliata 2018). In some cities (Palmyra, Gerasa, Apamea), the new churches blocked streets, indicating the power of the ecclesiastical authorities (Intagliata 2018, 28). Probably the biggest impact of the new religion was felt in Judaea: imperial patronage was behind the construction of churches at the major pilgrimage sites of Jerusalem (the Holy Sepulchre), and Bethlehem (of Nativity) and other locations (see Armstrong 1974; Kennedy 2000a; 2000b; Griffith-Jones 2018; Khoury 2018).

The evidence from the rural sites, especially from northern Syria, shows that, apart from trade, prosperity came also from cultivating the land. This also meant that water had to be managed carefully to support the population and their agricultural activities (Kamash 2012a; 2012b). The people engaged in animal husbandry and cultivation of land for the production of fruit and vegetables, while the numerous pressing facilities are testament to the high

production of olive oil and wine that were sold within and exported from the region. These are associated with over seven hundred settlements, whose well-preserved ruins have earned them the name "Dead Cities" in scholarship (for these, see Tate 1992; Liebeschuetz 2015, 263–264; Van Limbergen 2017; Yegül and Favro 2019, 790–797; Raja 2022a, 133–134) (fig. 26.3).

FIGURE 26.3. Qasr al-Banat. One of the "Dead Cities." Image © Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar.

Early Islamic Period

During the 630s, Syria and the Near East passed under Islamic control. In 661, Damascus became the capital of the Umayyad caliphate, which meant that Syria retained its geopolitical importance. One of the major changes that happened in the cities of the region with the advent of Islam from 632 onward is the creation of new spaces for worship. Like the Christians before them, these were sometimes converted buildings, not always churches: in Palmyra, a building identified as a temple to the Augusti, which must have retained its public function after the shift to Christianity, was converted into a mosque. Other times, the buildings were new constructions. In both cases, what was important was that they were centrally located, often close to the marketplace. These early mosques have a similar plan, with a hypostyle building opening onto a large courtyard (Genequand 2012, 63–64; 2013; Intagliata 2018, 28).

Another important change in this period is in the urban layout of the city: shops and workshops encroached on streets, while former public buildings were abandoned or were divided up between houses and shops. This resulted in much denser areas of occupation with narrow streets, which did not always indicate a sharp division between public (in this case

spaces for shops and small-scale industrial installations) and private (Kennedy 1985; see also Ward 2020). Newly founded Umayyad cities, however, show that the layout of the city followed a grid plan— for example, Anjar in Lebanon, which was built and abandoned within fifty years in the late seventh–early eighth centuries (see Hillenbrand 1999; see also Bessard 2020; Labisi 2020 for Umayyad cities and Marsham 2020 for an introduction to Umayyad history and culture).

Bathing complexes retained their importance in this period; they also followed the architectural changes seen in previous centuries and were small, with numerous rooms. Apart from the baths that continued to be used within cities, bathing complexes became associated with Umayyad elites and formed part of their palaces. Perhaps the best-known example of how baths functioned within the upper strata of Umayyad society can be seen in the monumental baths of Qusayr ʿAmra, which were part of the palace of Prince Walid Ibn Yazid, later Caliph Walid II (r. 743–744) (for Qusayr ʿAmra see Fowden 2004; Vibert-Guigue, Bisheh, and Imbert 2 007; Kowalewska 2021 for a general overview on baths; see also Arce 2015).

Qusayr ʿAmra was more than a palace, however; it was also a desert castle (*qasr* in Arabic, plural *qusur*), one of the fortified residence complexes that were close to sources of water and roads connecting cities as well as pilgrimage sites. Such locations made them ideal for controlling routes and local resources as well as for acting as station posts during the transportation of goods to major sites, like Damascus. While the luxury and decorative schemes seen in these castles had led scholars to see them as hunting lodges and pleasure palaces in the past, the understanding of their strategic position has led to a reevaluation of their role in the Umayyad economy and military and social structure (see Genequand 2006; Gaube 2012).

Conclusion

Urbanization in the region is a complex phenomenon. While there is no denying that several cities had a long history, the extent to which their residents were aware of it is a matter of debate, which is caused by scholarly reliance on different data sets. Millar (1993) focused more on historical texts and epigraphic evidence, which supported a break in structures between earlier and later periods; linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests continuities in cults and practices (Sartre 2001). Probably both took place: geography imposed limitations but also fostered connections: seas, rivers, deserts, and mountains are natural borders but they also contain routes that link the Mediterranean to the East, and while certain parts of the population stayed in their towns and villages, others, most likely a minority, traveled (see Brughmans et al. 2021; Seland 2021). Wars, conquests, and occupations also changed the populations: people were enslaved or deported as punishment, and settlers and colonists moved in, bringing their culture with them (Podany 2022, in passim; Raja and Sindbæk 2022b).

Changes in rulers also brought changes in architectural forms that were connected to displays of power: the Greeks tried to implement their regular grid-plan layouts in places where the memory of the widely spaced Achaemenid settlements persisted (see, for example, Bactria and the modern Surkhan Darya in Uzbekistan region: Martinez-Sève 2020; Stančo 2020). They built theaters and bath complexes and streets with columns, and they promoted an idea of urbanism that the Romans found useful and implemented as a building block of unity throughout their empire (see Yegül and Favro 2019, 3, 707–710). At the same time, Greek and Roman conquerors allowed expressions of regional diversity and beliefs, especially in the religious and funerary sphere, thus creating a seeming rift between the public image of a city and the lived experience within (often described as "glocalization," "resistance," "Romanization,"

"hybrid," "eclectic," and essentially expressing scholarly rigor and desire to fit everything into neat boxes) (see Raja 2022a, 135–136; de Jong 2022; Ewins and Reed 2022).

Religious changes also impacted the fabric of cities: temples to old gods were built with Greek or Roman influences, yet taking care that old cultic practices were perceived as unchanged. Temples then gave way to churches: while some were left as imposing ruins, others were converted, and then converted to mosques when Islam became the dominant religion.

Finally, changes in trade routes and natural disasters also changed the settlement patterns and urbanization in the region. What was necessary for a city changed from the Hellenistic and Roman periods to late antiquity and the Umayyad period: entertainment buildings and large bath complexes stopped being as important, while workshops and marketplaces became enmeshed in urban life in a way that was unprecedented.

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CHAPTER 27

NOMADS IN THE CLASSICAL AND BYZANTINE NEAR EAST

GIDEON AVNI AND STEVEN A. ROSEN

Introduction

What Is Nomadism? Definitions, Myths, and Environments

Nomadism in the classical Near East is a developed adaptation, the result of more than seven millennia of historical process and biological evolution. By classical times, all the essential animals of mobile pastoral lifestyles had long been domesticated. In chronological order of domestication, these are goat, sheep, donkeys, horses, and camels. Dogs, the first animals domesticated by people, were also exploited by mobile pastoralists but are not herd animals, and in this sense, they play only a secondary role. Cattle and pigs were not significant in the economies of mobile pastoralists, undoubtedly because they are ill-adapted to the marginal environments inhabited by Near Eastern nomads. Biological traits such as wool on sheep and subspecies adaptations to specific environments were also in place by classical times. Technological adaptations for better control of the animals—for example, the north Arabian saddle, bridles, and horseshoes—were also in common use. Finally, social contexts such as the existence of large markets and central political authorities, that is, states and empires, are the backdrop to mobile nomadism in classical times.

Nomadism (pastoral nomadism, mobile pastoralism, etc., to distinguish from hunter-gatherer mobility) is a social, ecological, and political adaptation in which human groups herd animals, most often in peripheral zones less appropriate for agriculture, and move seasonally to exploit seasonally available resources (grazing, water) to support herds. As in modern times, nomadism in this period comprises a spectrum of behaviors usually characterized as falling along two primary axes, sedentism versus mobility, and agriculture versus pastoralism. Although perceptions of nomadism tend to polarize these axes, viewing nomads as exclusively mobile without agriculture, both modern and ancient nomads engaged in a varied range of practices including investment in agriculture, either by the nomads themselves or their proxies, and different degrees of mobility. Political, social, and cultural organization constitute another axis of variability among nomadic groups, both in ancient and modern times. Although almost all groups in the Near East are/were organized in segmented patrilineal systems, the size (population, areal extent) of these systems varied considerably, and their consequent relations with sedentary states varied in accord.

Perceptions of nomadic cultures have also emphasized nomadic autonomy, despite clear integration in state and imperial trade systems, wage labor markets, political agreements, etc. Historical dynamics affect nomadic behaviors, and both the mix of farming and pastoralism and degrees of mobility vary with specific environmental and political contexts. Thus, large markets

for different pastoral products (meat, animals, transit trade products, etc.) may affect mobility patterns, and shifting settlement may allow greater or lesser practice of agriculture. Over the course of the long millennium of classical times in the Near East, one can trace clear dynamics in the nomadic adaptations, requiring that any characterization of the phenomenon consider long-term change.

Given nomadism as an adaptation to peripheral physical and social geographies, the great environmental variability of the Near East directly affected nomadic societies. Briefly, the following environmental factors must be considered in examining variability in nomadic societies: (1) patterns of rainfall, including amount of rainfall, seasonal distribution, and geographic distribution (e.g., Mediterranean systems versus monsoon systems); (2) topography, including the location of mountains, hills, valleys, and plains, and their absolute and relative heights compared one to the other; (3) the presence and distribution of water sources, perennial and ephemeral, their size, and their seasonal distribution in terms of capacity; and (4) the particulars of geography, such as the areal size of geographic units (large plains, patchworks of valleys, etc.), steep rainfall gradients, the presence of mountain passes, dune fields, and high water tables, etc. Secondary factors, determined by the primary factors outlined above, such as vegetation communities (e.g., steppe versus desert vegetation), specific seasonal growth patterns of vegetation, both affecting patterns of grazing, and borders of agricultural exploitation directly affect patterns of mobility and social organization.

In terms of physical adaptations, the domestication of the camel and its integration into Near Eastern economies, the dromedary in the west and the Bactrian camel in the east, is the baseline for understanding nomadic adaptations in the classical era. Camels can carry loads two to three times larger than what donkeys can carry and can go without water for up to three days, a crucial adaptation for traversing the Near Eastern deserts. They are more efficient in terms of caloric energetics and can be exploited for milk as well as meat. Thus, the camel allowed nomads to traverse long distances over arid regions efficiently, carrying large quantities of goods along routes previously inaccessible, and superseding donkeys in other regions. The camel allowed nomads to penetrate deeply and quickly into previously relatively inaccessible regions, offering a kind of shelter from the state. Although there has been debate about the use of camels for military purposes (Bulliet 1975; Caskel 1954; *contra* Macdonald 2015), there is no dispute that camels were used extensively for desert transportation. By the beginning of the classical era, the camel had been well integrated into Near Eastern economies and into desert societies.

Historiography

Three basic sources inform research on nomadic societies in the classical era: contemporary texts and descriptions, modern ethnography, and archaeology. The sources are not always in accord, and each must be approached critically, offering different perspectives on these cultures.

The writings of the "Western" (Greek and Roman) historians from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine period reflect the biased view of the peoples of the steppe and deserts as wandering savages. Only rarely do these descriptions reflect actual eyewitness accounts of the nomads, and as a rule references to the "barbarians" or "Saracens" represent an amorphous enemy.

The first detailed references to the nomadic societies on the peripheries of the Near East were provided by Greek and Roman scholars of the first century bc and first to second centuries ad: Strabo's *Geography*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, and Ptolemy's *Geography* (ref. in Hoyla

nd 2001). In addition, Diodorus Siculus (ca. 80–20 bc) described the Nabataeans as stateless nomads, based mainly on the earlier accounts of Hieronymus of Cardia (d. 323 bc) in a period when Petra and the Nabatean kingdom were well established. Although some of these observations are based on eyewitness accounts, the descriptions of the peoples in the East are flawed and affected by myths and legends. Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, a native of Antioch (d. ad 395), who served as an officer in the Roman army, described the peoples at the margins of the empire, the Huns, Germans, Alans, and Saracens using stereotypical images (Graf 1989, 355; Hoyland 2001, 96–97).

For the most part, the texts reflect political history and a sedentary state society perspective on peripheral tribal societies, most often a hostile one. The texts do not offer an indigenous perspective on Near Eastern nomads. There is rarely any description of nomadic lifeways, material culture, ideologies, etc. Even when nomads are described, the descriptions may be distorted or anachronistic. Thus, Pliny the elder describes the Egyptian Eastern Desert Blemmyes as headless, with their facial features embedded in their chests.

Other texts, which reflect more direct connections to pastoral nomads, should be examined from the perspectives of their origins and functions. Thus, the texts may originate as primary contemporary documents, such as treaties or economic texts (e.g., the pastoral nomads mentioned in the Nessana Papyri [Kraemer 1958]), or they may reflect travelers' accounts, sometimes reflecting considerable reworking or biases (Mayerson 1963; 1980; 1989).

Beyond these critical perspectives on the texts as a historical record, they are uneven. More texts are available from the western parts of the Near East, especially those originating in areas later part of the Roman Empire, than from areas farther east. This is likely to be a result of gaps in scholarship rather than in the actual existence of the texts since western scholarship on classical Persian and Mesopotamian texts has been more limited. Regardless, the texts offer invaluable historical datum points, with details including names, places, dates, and specific events not available from other sources. If the texts need to be approached critically, they still offer a crucial complement to other sources on classical-period nomads.

The most valuable and direct epigraphical reference to the nomadic presence in the Near Eastern steppe and desert areas are tens of thousands of short inscriptions, inscribed on rocks using a variety of north Arabian dialects or Aramaic language and scripts (e.g., Hoyland 2001, 64, 198–207; for corpuses, Graf 1989, 341; for inscriptions in the Hauran, Macdonald 1993; in Arabia, Robin 2014). These inscriptions bear evidence for the presence of literate nomadic peoples and hints of their daily life; they also enable identification of different tribal groups. Linguistically, two main groups of inscriptions are defined: Thamudic inscriptions, representing the tribe of Thamud inhabiting central Arabia and Hijaz (although the geographical distribution of these inscriptions is wider), and Safaitic inscriptions, after the Safa region of southern Syria. There are lively debates on these general definitions, which do not reflect the large variety and local aspects of the corpus of inscriptions (Graf 1989, 357–359; Macdonald 1993; Hoyland 2001, 198–201).

Although most inscriptions are short graffiti inscribed on the black patinated local limestones, they have great value for the understanding of the classical-period desert societies. Within the large corpus of Safaitic inscriptions (more than fourteen thousand to date), at least 140 tribal designations are defined, many attesting to clan and kinship groups. Some of the larger tribal groups are known also from Greek, Nabataean, and Aramaic inscriptions (Graf 1989, 359–366). It is interesting that the number of Safaitic and Thamudic inscriptions decreased dramatically after the fourth century, perhaps reflecting shifting patterns of literacy among local nomadic societies.

The interpretative connection between present-day Bedouin societies and the nomads of the Hellenistic and Roman period began with the early studies of the ethnography and ethnohistory

of Near Eastern nomadic groups in the nineteenth century. The descriptions of adventurers and explorers such as Burkhardt, Seetzen, Burton, and others were supplemented by numerous travelers' accounts in the Holy Land. Much of this work offers a rich view of recent nomadic groups, with detailed descriptions of material culture and customs, although often tinged by Orientalist tendencies and reinforced by the uncritical readings of the ancient texts. Well into the twentieth century, perceptions of Near Eastern nomads were of primitive and fossilized peoples, locked in ancient patterns of life. Thus, for example, the early anthropological film *Grass* (Cooper and Schoedsack 1925) documenting the annual Bakhtiari migration up the Zagros Range views the filmmakers' trek east from Ankara to the land of the Bakhtiari quite literally as a trip back in time. Obviously, not all descriptions are so tainted. Musil's (1928) accounts of the Rwalla and other Bedouin groups in Jordan in the early twentieth century are literally a treasure of description, and even *Grass*, as a contemporary recording of the ascent to pasture in the Zagros, offers detail unachievable otherwise.

Applying the descriptions and models of recent Bedouin life to understanding ancient nomadic societies is not obvious. One cannot assume social and ecological equivalence between ancient and modern groups. Many factors mitigate strongly against any direct adoption of ethnographic analogy in filling in the blanks of the historical record. Thus, major technological changes, even at the beginning of the modern period, have significantly influenced all aspects of nomadic life. For example, the adoption of guns into Bedouin societies, beginning roughly in the early nineteenth century, not only affected patterns of warfare and hunting but also changed the balance of power in many areas. The unrestricted use of guns also caused local extinctions, significantly impacting local ecologies. Ecological balances were also negatively affected by the great population growth (especially relative to ancient times) which included the growth of herds and the imposition of modern borders. Both resulted in general overgrazing, not evident in earlier times. Of course, demographic growth, the result of modern medicine, imposed political stability, and sedentarization and farming among nomadic communities also changed basic social structures. Similarly, access to modern state markets, the rise of world systems, and globalization also affected tribal economics—from the ability to buy manufactured goods in large quantities (with all attendant effects), to changing patterns of seasonal migration, to creating markets for tribal labor (Khoury and Kostiner 1990, Lewis 1987; Mundy and Musallam 2000). These factors are not merely quantitatively different from ancient times but reflect fundamental changes in nomadic lifestyles. Even when tribal peoples remained nomadic, modern ethnographies reflect modern economies and political contexts. Finally, the range of variability in recent nomadic societies is great. Given the historical dynamism of nomadism, one is also left with the question of which ethnographic analogy to adopt. Thus, if ethnography can offer frameworks for examining ancient nomadic societies, these must be approached critically against the historical and archaeological records.

The archaeological record of nomadism in the classical Near East comprises two kinds of data. Indirect archaeological evidence of nomadic societies consists of archaeological evidence of sedentary interaction with nomads. Thus, the forts of the Limes Palaestina in Jordan were built in conjunction with the nomadic presence in the periphery of the empire but do not directly reflect nomadic cultures (e.g., Parker 1986). Similarly, trade goods brought into the settled regions either deriving from nomadic production or transhipped by nomads suggest nomadic activities, but are only indirect indicators of the nomadic societies themselves.

Direct archaeological evidence of nomadic societies consists of the remains of the encampments and material culture associated with them, desert shrines, cemeteries and cult features, way stations and associated features (cisterns, wells, roads) built for or utilized by nomadic traders, and other pastoral sites such as pens and rock shelters used for stabling (e.g., Rosen 1987; 1993; Avni 1992; 1996, Rosen and Avni 1993; 1997; Haiman 1995; Cribb 1991; B

arnard 2009; Sidebotham et al. 2002). Contrary to perspectives originating in the archaeology of settled zones, the deserts of the Near East are rich in archaeological remains of ancient nomads (Rosen 2009). Like the textual record, research on the archaeology of nomads has been patchy at best. Between the political instabilities of the region and the short history of archaeological research, the ancient nomadic societies of many regions remain unstudied archaeologically.

The limitations of the archaeological record are well understood, but given discussions in the literature, several points should be emphasized. The archaeological record, even for classical times, rarely offers fine enough chronological resolution or details of events to grapple with political history. Instead, and in contrast to the textual record, it offers a cumulative perspective on long-term trends. Of course, the archaeological record also offers details on the specifics of nomadic lifeways, including everyday life in technology, architecture, exchange, and even ritual and cult, usually not available from other sources. With all the problems inherent in the archaeological record (preservation, interpretation of material culture, the extrapolation to behaviors and beliefs, etc.), it offers a contemporary record of nomadic societies from within those societies themselves.

Nomads on the Ground

Nomads on the peripheries of the Near East between the Hellenistic and early Islamic periods are characterized by two levels of social organization, the extended family/clan and the level of tribes/nomadic kingdoms. The first is observed through the material culture in nomadic encampments and settlements, revealed in archaeological excavations and surveys, particularly in the southern Levant. The level of large-scale social organization, the "nomadic kingdoms" or states, is seen in historical descriptions and the material evidence of the imperial response to the nomadic presence on its borders.

Research in the Negev offers an in-depth study of the smaller scale of nomadic society. Hundreds of sites, including different types of camps (figs. 27.1, 27.2, 27.3), pens, rock shelters, cemeteries, shrines, wells, cisterns (the last two utilized but perhaps not built by the nomads), etc. have been surveyed and many excavated to offer a relatively detailed view of the nature of nomadic adaptations. Encampments (fig. 27.1) have been documented beginning with sites dating to the beginning of the first millennium ad through the early Islamic period. Campsites (fig. 27.2) range in size from a few structures, representing a camping group of several households through large sites of dozens or more structures, probably representing seasonal aggregates. Structures vary from round or oval stone alignments and features (fig. 27.3), representing tent camps, through more substantial curvilinear structures reflecting huts or winter tents. Sites tend to align along the terraces of secondary wadis. The larger camps cluster in areas beyond the run-off agricultural zones, while small camps are found deep into the agricultural zones, probably reflecting seasonal dispersal and connections with the desert settlements of the classical era (Rosen 1987; 2007; Avni 1996). Material culture (ceramics, metals, glass, coinage, milling stones) testifies to the strong interconnections with the settled zone but also reflects pastoral lifeways in its functional configurations. Shifting patterns of settlement, changes in architecture (including cult sites and the appearance of open-air mosques), and changing quantities and types of material culture reflect shifting social, economic, and political trends. Although contemporary texts imply tense relations between the desert and settled zones, the proximity and indeed overlap in settlement patterns (as in the large number of monastic settlements in Sinai [Dahari 2000]), and the dominance of settled

zone material culture in the desert sites suggest a long period of stable relations punctuated by the perturbations evident in the texts. If the beginning of this classical nomad complex can be traced to the Nabateans, it achieves a peak in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods in number of sites, diversity of material culture found on the sites, and depth of relations with the settled zone (Haiman 1995; Avni 1996). Following the ninth and tenth centuries ad, the system seems to have experienced a significant contraction and sites are no longer found in the Negev until Ottoman times (Avni et al. 2013).

FIGURE 27.1. Aerial view of the early Islamic nomadic encampment at Har Karkom, in the central Negev. The round structures are similar in pattern to those of the Eastern Desert and represent either substantial tent bases or hut bases. Photograph by G. Avni.

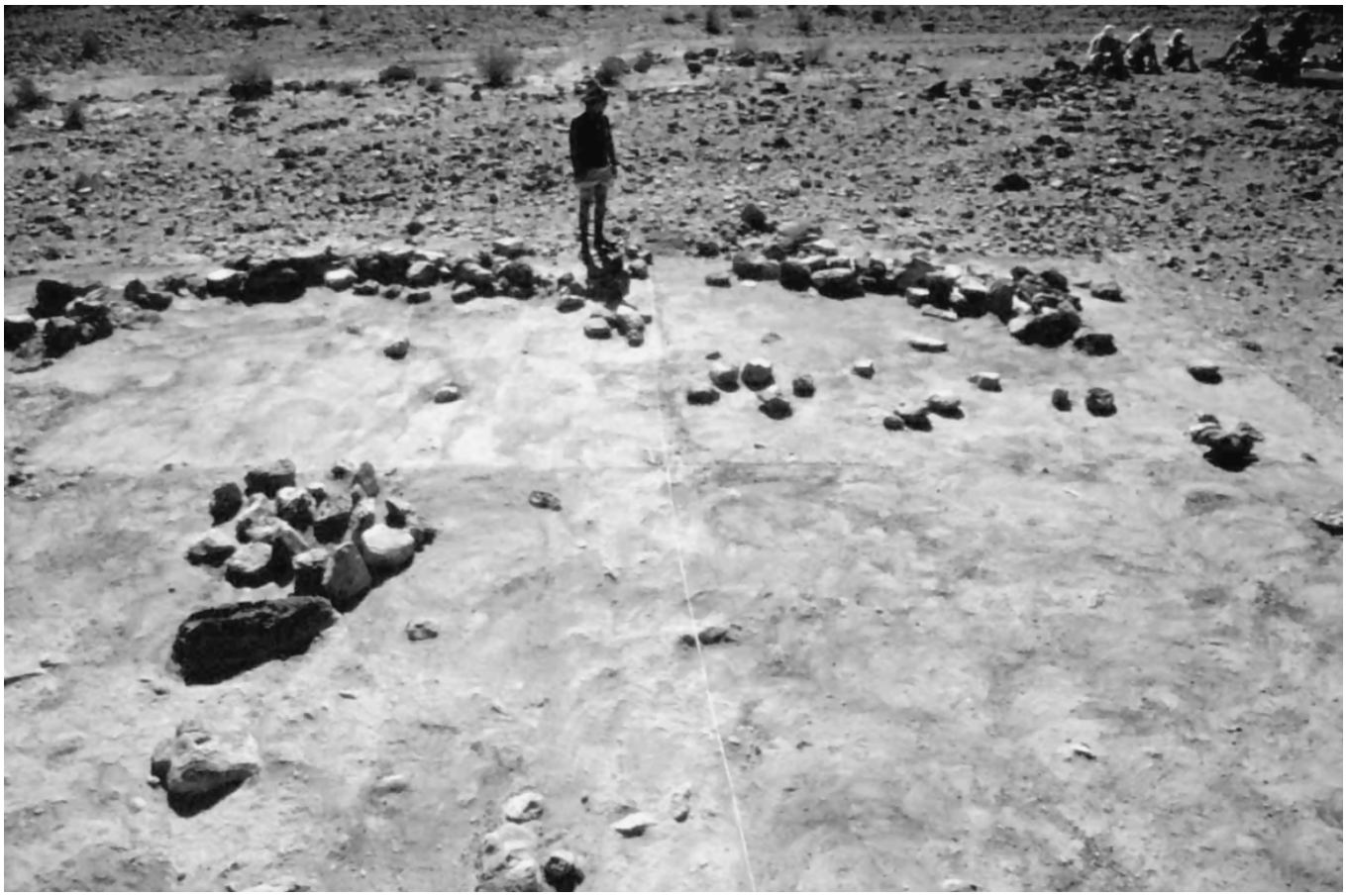

FIGURE 27.2. Excavated tent remains at the Nabatean tent camp of Givot Reved, in the central Negev. Photograph by S. A. Rosen.

FIGURE 27.3. View of unexcavated hut or tent basecamp at the late Byzantine/early Islamic site of Har Oded in the central Negev. Photograph by S. A. Rosen.

Archaeological research in the Eastern Desert of Egypt has also provided a long sequence of nomadic presence. Like contemporary sites in the Negev, these consisted of networks of round and elliptical stone structures built along wadi terraces (Sidebothamet al. 2002 ; Lassányi 2012, 253–260). Some of these settlements included hundreds of dwellings, the function of which was not clear. Temporary structures, burials, and other installations have also been documented, and show continuity with earlier periods (Krzywinski 2012). Based on the similarities to other nomadic settlements in the fringe of the Nile Valley and southern Egypt (Lassányi 2012, 257–258), and the Negev Highlands, these seem to represent the typical settlements of the nomadic population of the Eastern Desert, perhaps the Blemmyes. There was an intensification of nomadic settlement in these regions during Roman and Byzantine times (Lassányi 2012), with an increase in the number of settlements between the fourth and seventh centuries. The settlements of the Eastern Desert were abandoned from the second half of the sixth century onward, together with the decline of international trade and the closing of the gold mines in the desert.

Beyond the Negev and Eastern Desert, nomadic presence has been documented in only a few regions in the Near East, in southern Jordan (Banning 1986), in Sinai, to a lesser extent in southern Syria (the Hauran), and in the western desert of Egypt (Rieger 2012). There should be no doubt that field research will reveal similar phenomena in other areas of the Near East, where only preliminary archaeological research on nomads has been conducted.

Nomadic States

Nomadic confederations, kingdoms, or states are difficult to define precisely (Salzman 2014; Khoury and Kostiner 1990) and usually present complex structures of interactions with settled peoples (Khazanov 1984, 228–233). Such large social and political structures on the desert fringes of the Levant and in Arabia are evidenced most notably in the historical sources. In Syria-Palestine, the more prominent of these were the Nabateans between the third century BC and AD 106, and the Jafnids, who ruled the Ghassanid confederation in the fifth and sixth centuries; in Egypt the Blemmyes were the dominant group; and in Iran several tribal groups strongly affected the Parthian and Sasanian Empires (Potts 2014, 88–156). Other ad hoc political organizations of nomadic tribes were known from when they were involved in banditry, which created military confrontations with the imperial powers. This was the case with Mavia, "Queen of the Saracens," who raided Palestine and Phoenicia in the second half of the fourth century AD, forcing the Roman authorities to recognize her as an ally (Bowersock 1980; Mayerson 1980).

Although outdated in reference to archaeological remains and disputed in some conclusions, the monumental work of Shahid (1984; 1989; 1995–2002) still serves as a basic reference for knowledge of these nomadic states. More recent studies illuminate the crystallization of large political structures based on the nomadic societies (Fisher 2011a; 2011b; 2015; Dijkstra and Fisher 2014; Genequand 2015; Graf 1898; Macdonald 1991; 2015; Genequand and Robin 2015; Whittow 2015; Hoyland 2009).

The conglomeration of nomads into larger political and social structures created a challenge to the Roman and Byzantine imperial authorities, leading to a complex relationship that included occasional confrontations but also political alliances between the empire and the nomads.

Thus, in the early fourth century, Imru' al-Qays ibn-'Amr, the royal successor of the Lakhmid dynasty in Hira, proclaimed himself "King of the Arabs" following his military campaign into the Arabian Peninsula (Bowersock 1983, 132–136). In 473, a tribal leader named Amoreksos emerged from Persia and took possession of the island of Jotaba in the Gulf of Aqaba, later to be appointed by the Byzantine emperor Leo as the phylarch of the Saracens in Palaestina Tertia. Temporary nomadic kingdoms in the border areas between Rome and Sasanian Persia are well represented by the Palmyrene revolt led by Septimia Zenobia, who became the Queen of the Arabs in ad 270. Zenobia directed her armed forces from Palmyra into Egypt and established a short-term kingdom that was crushed by a Roman conquest in 274. The rapid spread of the Zenobia revolt owed much to the alliance with the nomadic tribes of the Syrian Desert, who supported her troops, as evidenced in several Safaitic inscriptions (Graf 1989). The increased effect of these military actions on the Roman and later Byzantine imperial policies in the East resulted in awareness of the political power of the Arab tribes, which led to the consolidation of support treaties between the empire and the Arab tribal groups of "kingdoms."

The question of mass migration of southern and central Arabian tribes northward as a factor that enhanced the crystallization of these "nomadic kingdoms" has been partly clarified with the study of the epigraphical material and archaeological remains. Neither indicate any massive migrations or penetration of pastoral nomadic tribes from central Arabia to Syria, contradicting the myth of waves of nomadic tribes emerging from Arabia and threatening the Mediterranean societies. There are, however, indications of continuous contacts between Syria and Arabia in pre-Islamic times in the form of commercial trade and increasing cultural influences (Graf 1989, 379).

Thus, the view of nomads as a threat to the settled communities, and the belief that the main aim in the creation of the military fortification line in the east, the Limes Arabicus, was the defense of the Arabian frontier (Parker 1986; 2006) was replaced by a milder approach that saw mutual coexistence between settlers and nomads in the fringe areas of the Near East (Banning 1986; Graf 1989; and Isaac 1992 for historical perspectives of the *limes*). The tensioned coexistence between the imperial powers and the nomadic tribes living on their periphery was not expressed by large-scale military confrontations but rather by local conflicts in which the nomads molested the fringes of the settled or monastic communities through minor thefts and local incursions.

The role of the nomads in shaping imperial borders in the east has been also debated based on the archaeology of the fortress systems. While Parker favors the establishment of massive borders along the Via Nova Traiana against the menacing desert tribes, other studies suggest a milder process of interaction, in which the nomadic elements did not threaten the borders of the empire, but on the contrary, had to adapt their social and political structures to those of the imperial powers (Parker 1986; 2006; Freeman and Kennedy 1986 *contra* Banning 1986; 1987; also Macdonald 2015; Liebeschuetz 2015, 223–320; Dijkstra and Fisher 2014).

The complex relationships between Rome and the Arabs are reflected in the processes of change in the nomadic societies during the first centuries ad. The so-called "Bedouinization of Arabia" thesis (Caskel 1954) claimed that the Roman annexation of border client states—the Nabataeans in ad 106, Mesopotamian states in 228, and Palmyra in ad 272—together with the decline of the international caravan trade forced the Arab tribes to shift from trading to pastoralism and banditry. The idea has been rejected by many recent scholars (Macdonald 2015 for summary) and the main argument against the nomads of Arabia or north Africa as a military power using horses and camels is the lack of any historical or archaeological references for such use (Graf 1989, 393–396; Macdonald 2015; for north Africa see Shaw 1979). Thus, nomads were not a major military force, and the image of the hordes of nomads raiding on camelback is derived from colonial romantic views of "Lawrence of Arabia" rather than from the historical realities of the classical era.

Regardless, the symbiotic relationships between the empires and the tribal groups on their frontiers led to the establishment of "nomadic kingdoms," which developed political and social complexity, inevitably leading to sedentarization. Thus, the Jafnid dynasty in Syria and Nasrid dynasty in Iraq developed their own governmental systems and military capabilities, together with impressive architectural traditions, much influenced by Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian traditions (Genequand 2006; 2015; Hoyland 2009; Fisher 2011b). This picture of sedentarization and political dominance of the Arab tribes during the late Roman and Byzantine periods is complex. The Roman interest in the deal was clear: to build up the Jafnid dynasty as the leaders of the Ghassanid tribes to counter the threat of the Persian-supported Lakhmids, and vice versa with the Persian interests in the Lakhmids. Whittow (2011; 2015) notes interesting similarities between the leaders of the tribal confederations in the Roman and Byzantine periods, and the early twentieth-century Rashidis of Hail in Arabia, who acted as clients to the Ottomans.

In Egypt, the Blemmyes were organized in tribes living in a kingdom in lower Nubia and also controlling the Eastern Desert of Egypt, and were known by various exotic names (Barnard 2009, 19–20; 2012). A glimpse of the social structures and external connections of the Blemmyes was found in Qasr Ibrim in lower Nubia, in a letter dated to ca. 450, written by Phonen, "king of the Blemmyes," and addressed to Abourni, king of the Noubades. In his letter, Phonen acknowledges that the city of Talmis (Kalabsha) in the Nile Valley was conquered by Abourni, and he claims his city back in exchange for a ransom of sheep, camels, and silver (Barnard 2009, 20). The context of the letter together with the title "king" which Phonen uses to identify

himself, contradicts the common view of the Blemmyes as pastoral nomads and marauders of the Eastern Desert. Adding to this social and economic complexity, the Blemmyes seem to have worked the Roman gold mines of the Eastern Desert and to have supplied the main roads and trading routes that crossed the desert, connecting the Nile Valley settlements (Koptos and Edfu) with Berenike and Myos Hormos–Quseir al-Qadim as the main port of the Red Sea (Sidebotham 2011).

Looking at markers of ethnicity among the nomads of the Eastern Desert, it is interesting to note the presence of Nabataean inscriptions in this area. A corpus of eight-four inscriptions has been defined, most of them found along the ancient trade routes, covering a large chronological span between the third century bc and the second century ad (Mohamed 2012). One of the inscriptions mentions camel driver as a profession, hinting at the involvement of Nabataeans along the main trade routes between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea. The distribution of inscriptions indicates that the Nabataean presence extended from Sinai to the northern Eastern Desert, up to Wadi Hammamat in the south. The border between Nabataeans and Blemmyes was perhaps along this line, as there are no Nabataean inscriptions to the south of it, and the Eastern Desert Ware does not extend to the north of this line (Power 2012, 286).

Summarizing, the relationships between the Roman Empire and the nomadic tribal groups on its eastern frontier consisted of both animosity and coexistence, in accordance with the political interests of each side. While hostility between Rome and the north Arabian tribes was created following the annexation of the Nabatean kingdom in ad 106, formal relationships were established during the late third and fourth centuries, expressed in the restoration of trade routes and the incorporation of Arab nomads into the Roman army. These complex relationships were well presented in the famous Rawaffa inscription, found in a tribal temple in central Arabia, commemorating the establishment of friendly relationships between Rome and the desert tribes (Graf 1978, 9–11).

Conclusion

The debates on the identity, social organization, and historical roles of desert nomadic communities in classical and post-classical times are not resolved. The traditional view that saw the nomads as the masters of the desert and source of animosity, conflict, and threat to the large powers of the Near East—the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Empires—is no longer valid. The nomads of the steppe and desert were constantly threatened by the nearby imperial powers and had to modify their traditional way of life to survive, either by a process of sedentarization or by providing services to the empires as hired laborers, soldiers in the imperial armies, guides, and animal breeders (Mayerson 1989; Graf 1978; 1989; Macdonald 2015). The great mobility of the nomadic groups and the fact that they roamed the fringe of the settled land made them more vulnerable to political changes. The accumulated archaeological and epigraphical material from different regions in the Near East strongly supports the view that the nomads who frequented the steppe and desert areas maintained a delicate equilibrium with the nearby imperial powers. The establishment of the nomadic confederations, first the Nabataean, and then the Jafnid-Ghassanid and Lakhmid, provided the nomads a unique position in the imperial geopolitical structures between Rome and Byzantium in the west and Parthian and Sasanian Persia in the east.

This said, it should be noted that the establishment of the nomadic kingdoms in Roman and Byzantine times changed the balance between nomads and settlers. The effects of the Zenobia and Mavia revolts, and the later treaties between the empire and the nomads, led to the

sedentarization of the nomads and to rapid acquisition of wealth. The power of the Jafnid dynasty and the Ghassanid tribes is well reflected in pre-Islamic poetry and the Arab imagination. Although early Islam was profoundly a culture of the sedentary world of Arabia, the rapid Islamic conquest of the 630s was much influenced by pre-Islamic desert tribal traditions.

This delicate equilibrium ceased with the Arab conquests that united the Near East into a single political unit for the first time since Alexander the Great. The abandonment of imperial support at the end of the sixth century opened the road to the emergence of Arabian peoples and led to the swift conquest of the Near East. This is well reflected in the much-quoted paragraph of Theophanes, describing the circumstances that led to the Arab invasion:

> Now some of the neighboring Arabs were receiving small payments from the emperors for guarding the approaches to the desert. At that time a certain eunuch arrived to distribute the wages of the soldiers, and when the Arabs came to receive their wages according to the custom, the eunuch drove them away, saying: "The emperor can barely pay his soldiers their wages, much less these dogs!" Distressed by this, the Arabs went over to their fellow tribesmen, and it was they that led them to the rich country of Gaza. (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6123, trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 466)

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CHAPTER 28

COMMAGENE

MATTHEW P. CANEPA

Introduction

Commagene was a fertile land located between the Euphrates River and the Taurus Mountains (Str. 2.12.2; 2.14.1–2; 12.1.2; Marciak 2012; Blömer et al. 2021) (fig. 28.1). From at least the beginning of the third century BC, the Seleucid Empire held Commagene along with the lands of the broader region. It was detached along with neighboring provinces by the newly independent Orontid kingdom of Sophene sometime in the mid-third century BC, before falling again under Seleucid sway around 188 BC when empire briefly reasserted control over Sophene. Commagene only became an independent kingdom in its own right ca. 163/162 BC when its Seleucid governor, who claimed Orontid ancestry, succeeded in revolting from the Seleucid Empire and defending his fledgling kingdom against regional rivals. This was the first time that Commagene had formed the core of a distinct polity since the late Hittite principality of Kummuḫ. The kingdom of Commagene shared frontiers variously with the Seleucid Empire, the kingdoms of Sophene and Cappadocia, the Armenian Empire of Tigranes the Great, and eventually the Roman and Parthian Empires. Its borderlands extended southward into the plains of northern Syria and, at times, over the Euphrates, though it should be emphasized that Commagene's Hellenistic frontiers fluctuated according to which larger kingdom or empire it was incorporated into and with the ambitions and fortunes of its rulers. Despite briefly falling under the sphere of influence of Tigranes II's Armenian Empire (ca. mid-80s–69 BC) and an interlude of direct Roman rule (AD 17–38), the kingdom survived longer than almost all other post-Seleucid kingdoms in Anatolia and the Caucasus through shrewd diplomacy, marriage alliances, and, eventually, close cooperation with the Romans. Indeed, while the kingdom was permanently incorporated into the Roman Empire ca. 72/73, its dynastic scions continued to flourish as Roman aristocrats for decades thereafter. This chapter thus analyzes Commagene's history, archaeology, and religions from the fall of the Persian Empire to its incorporation into the Roman Empire.

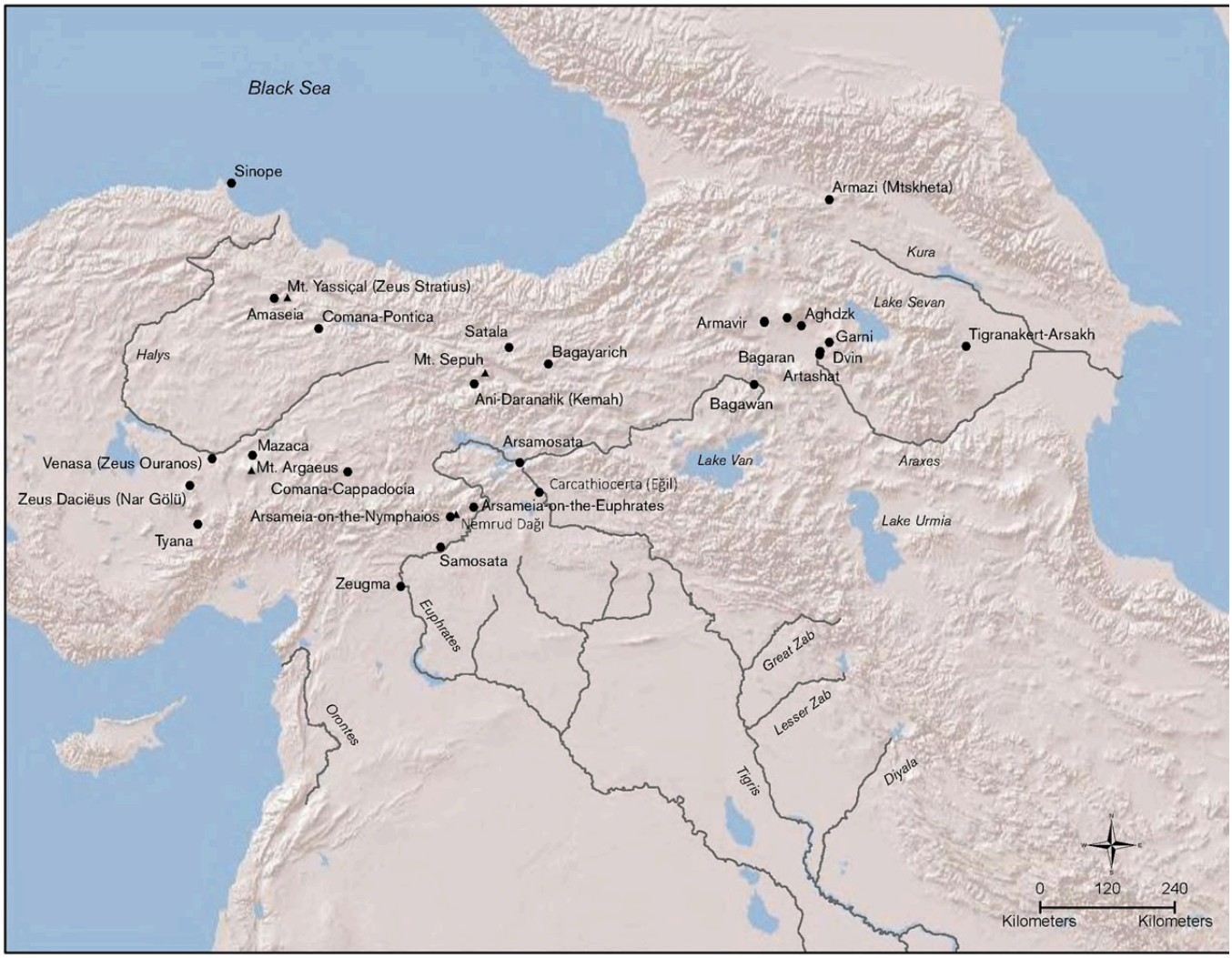

Figure 28.1. Principle sites in Commagene and Neighboring Regions (map adapted from Canepa 2018, Map 4).

Hellenistic Commagene's demographic, linguistic, cultural, and political makeup reflects the region's complex history. At different points in history, its Orontid kings strategically accentuated specific histories and traditions to appeal to select internal and external audiences. Gods with roots in Anatolia's ancient Hittite-Luwian heritage were still worshipped within the Hellenistic kingdom even as they took on elements of Greek or Iranian religious traditions. With the rise of the Pontic and Armenian empires and eventually Parthia, new currents of post-Achaemenid Iranian kingship gained prominence as ultimately did the political traditions of Rome.

Commagene's ruling dynasty and aristocracy cultivated both Persian and Graeco-Macedonian traditions and familial roots while foregrounding royal and dynastic traditions that tied them to an Armenian-Cappadocian-Pontic politico-cultural continuum. The rulers of the independent kingdom of Commagene traced their ancestry to the Persian Orontid dynasty who ruled as satraps over Achaemenid Armenia and (briefly) Mysia. The Orontids consolidated an autonomous kingdom in the Armenian highlands after Alexander's destruction of the Achaemenid Empire and a branch of the Orontid family governed Sophene under the Seleucids. While the historicity of a direct lineal relationship is by no means clear, the Orontids of Commagene claimed the dynastic heritage of the main Ortontid line of Sophene and Greater Armenia, and through it, that of the Achaemenid dynasty. In this regard, Commagene and its

ruling family shared many characteristics with other kingdoms that emerged in Anatolia, northern Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus after the fall of the Persian Empire that were similarly ruled by post-satrapal Persian dynasties (Canepa 2017; 2018, 5–7 and 95–121; 2021; Strootman and Versluys 2017; Strootman 2021). Like the Mithradatids of Pontus and Ariarathids of Cappadocia, Commagene's ruling dynasty boasted of an ancestry that grew from and united both the Seleucid and Achaemenid dynastic legacies.

In the Hellenistic period, the majority of Commagene's population appears to have spoken Syrian Aramaic, and Roman commentators understood Commagene to be culturally and geographically part of "Syria," not just because of its administrative incorporation (e.g., Plin., *HN* 5.66; Str., *Geog*. 11.12.3, 16.1.22; Lucian., *Syr. D.* 1; Versluys 2017, 38–41). The king, court, and aristocracy spoke Greek, which was the language of administration and royal inscriptions, and possibly cultivated some spoken dialect of western Middle Iranian as a marker of their Persian heritage, though this is not directly attested beyond onomastics and toponyms. From the perspective of both the Roman literary sources and emic characterizations in the epigraphic evidence from Commagene, Armenian royal heritage was largely concomitant with Orontid dynastic claims. Nevertheless, this centuries-long connection to Armenian kings drew Commagene into the Armenian cultural and political orbit where it would often return into late antiquity and the Middle Ages even if it was not as closely or as continuously integrated as Sophene or the Armenian highlands.

Commagene experienced the height of its political power under Antiochus I Theos (ca. 70s–ca. 36 bc). Antiochus I introduced "newly ancient" Iranian cultic traditions across his kingdom strategically crafting and foregrounding a Perso-Macedonian cultural identity (Canepa 2018, 112 and 240–248; Canepa 2021). After the dissolution of Tigranes II's empire (ca. 69/68 bc), Antiochus built numerous dynastic and funerary sanctuaries across Commagene, most notably his own mountaintop funerary monument and cult site at Nemrud Dağı. This contained colossal cult statues, inscriptions, and stelae of his paternal and maternal ancestors stretching back to Darius I and Alexander the Great. While Antiochus I's creations were deeply rooted in the traditions of his dynasty and kingdom, they can also be seen as growing from a wider late Hellenistic phenomenon wherein client kings caught between Rome and Parthia sought to bolster their legitimacy and lineage through similar programs of monumental building and religious renovation. These included the Hasmonaean and Herodian sovereigns of Judaea, the rulers of Emesa, the Ituraeans, and Nabataeans (Kropp 2013; Versluys 2017, 232–241). Indeed, from this perspective, Antiochus I's strategy was not dissimilar to that of Augustus, who, several decades later, appropriated and reinvented earlier Italic and archaic Roman republican traditions to form his own neo-conservative visual and religious imperial idiom (Zanker 1988; Versluys 2017, 221–229).

Ancient literary sources routinely comment on or allude to Hellenistic Commagene's great wealth and agricultural bounty (e.g., Plut., *Ant.* 34.3; Jos., *BI* 1.321.22; Cass. Dio. 49.20.3–5, 23.3–4; Str., *Geog*. 12.2.1). The kingdom's legendary prosperity came not just from the land's considerable agrarian output but also its control of key Euphrates river crossings and overland routes and thus the Eurasian trade that flowed into Rome from the Parthian Empire (Brijder 2014 170–174). Ancient literary sources routinely comment on or allude to Hellenistic Commagene's great wealth and agricultural bounty (e.g., Plut., *Ant*. 34.3; Jos., *BI* 1.321.22; Cass. Dio. 49.20.3–5, 23.3–4; Str., *Geog*. 12.2.1). Exploration and study of the archaeological history of the region began in the mid-nineteenth century (Brijder 2014, 176–310).

Historical Overview

Hellenistic Commagene encompassed the territory of the late Hittite principality of Kummuḫ, whose name is detectable in the classical toponym (Messerschmidt 2012, 26; Brijder 2014, 52–53). While continuities with Hittite traditions should not be overstated, Antiochus I may have selectively reinvigorated certain monumental and even cultic traditions stemming from the region's ancient Hittite past as raw material to lend a patina of antiquity to his newly ancient cult architecture and reliefs (Messerschmidt 2008; 2012; Brijder 2014, 53–55). Kummuḫ was incorporated into the Assyrian Empire and following a revolt, the Assyrians deported the region's inhabitants and replaced with them with a population drawn from Mesopotamia (Facella 2006, 73–78).

The history of Commagene under the Achaemenid and Seleucid empires is very murky and we lack clear evidence of many pivotal historical developments. After trading hands between Egypt and the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the region passed into the Persian Empire with Cyrus the Great's conquests. Unlike Melitene to the north, Commagene does not appear in any Persian epigraphic or archival source, and it is unclear which Achaemenid satrapy or subsatrapy controlled it (Klinkott 2005, 451–453; Khorikyan 2017; Marciak 2017, 115). Because Commagene's Hellenistic rulers traced their ancestry to the Orontids, some interpreters have speculated that Commagene might have formed an administrative unit within the Achaemenid satrapy of Armina. This is possible, but no concrete evidence can confirm this. Given the longevity of Persian traditions in the region, likely an influx of Iranian settlers formed the core of the region's aristocracy; however, the Persian Empire left a relatively light infrastructural footprint and no major settlements. An important Persian-period aristocratic residence was constructed at Tille Höyük, a site with previous Assyrian occupation, though the Persian-period structures do not bear the marks of imperially sponsored architecture as witnessed at sites elsewhere in the empire, either those that implant ground plans and architectural forms from the imperial center at, for example, Karačamirli and Dahan-e Gholayman, or those that adapted regional prestige architectures, as at Dascylium (Blaylock 2009, 157 and 171–212; Canepa 2018, 25–28). Despite claims in earlier scholarship that misidentified Hellenistic levels at Samosata as Achaemenid, there is little evidence of continuous administrative occupation at Achaemenid sites discovered in Commagene, including Tille Höyük. This suggests a significant reorganization occurred after Alexander and that the Achaemenid satrapal boundaries and dynastic spheres of influence changed after Alexander as had happened elsewhere in Anatolia and the Caucasus (Marciak 2012, 16; Canepa 2018, 95–98). It is unclear when exactly Commagene became the possession of an Orontid-ruled satrapy or kingdom, although our first indirect evidence suggests that this may have occurred only in the Seleucid period. Only in the later Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods does clear evidence appear linking Commagene and its rulers dynastically and politically to the Orontids.

By 300 bc, Commagene was a part of the vast Seleucid Empire, which left an equally important cultural and dynastic legacy (Strootman 2021). Seleucus I Nicator founded what later became the most important urban settlement of the independent kingdom of Commagene, the twin cities Seleucia-on-the-Euphrates and Apamea controlling the Euphrates River crossing, known collectively as Zeugma. However, Zeugma became a possession of the kingdom of Commagene only in the first century bc through the intervention of Pompey the Great (Plin., *HN* 5.86; Cohen 1996, 190–196). Under the early Seleucid Empire, the region appears to have been largely left to its local governors. The core of Commagene never experienced the intensive city foundation that was the hallmark of strategically and symbolically important regions of the Seleucid Empire.

Commagene formed part of the independent kingdom of Sophene after Sophene broke away from Seleucid suzerainty in the mid- to late third century before its reincorporation after the Peace of Apamea (188). During these decades, the rulers of Sophene founded many of Commagene's most important fortified royal residence cities. Scholarship is not entirely in agreement over the identity or even number of kings attested in the numismatic evidence or mentioned in the fragmentary classical literary sources for this period (Facella 2006; Marciak 2012; 2017, 113–128). For this reason the archaeological evidence is of especial importance as an anchor for the meager literary and numismatic sources and to fill out and check the epigraphic evidence.

Sometime in the mid-third century bc the Orontid king of Sophene, Arsames, rebelled from Seleucus II and refused to pay tribute to the Seleucid king (Polyaenus, *Strat*. 4.17) and around 227 bc, Arsames offered the Seleucid usurper Antiochus Hierax refuge at his court (Facella 2006, 174–175; Marciak 2017, 116). Arsames founded many of the fortified settlements that the later independent kingdom of Commagene inherited during this period of independence. Among the several Seleucid satraps and clients who were in revolt at the start of Antiochus III's reign, Polybius mentions a king of Sophene named Xerxes who refused to pay tribute (Polyb. 8.23.1–5). Antiochus III advanced on Xerxes and besieged Arsamosata, forcing Xerxes to flee the royal residence. Xerxes quickly sued for peace and returned Sophene to tributary status ca. 212 bc. In addition to giving him generous terms, Antiochus III gave Xerxes his sister (*adelphēn*), Antiochis, as wife. According to a different source, Antiochis then promptly assassinated him on the orders of her brother (John of Antioch, fr. 122; Roberto 2005, 194–195). Strabo (*Geog*. 11.1.4.15) implies that Antiochus III installed two other rulers, Artaxias and Zariadres, as client rulers over the Armenian highlands and Sophene, respectively. This appears to be the same Zariadres mentioned in several early second-century Aramaic inscriptions from Armenian boundary stones, which describe him as the father of Artaxias and an "Orontid" (Marciak 2017, 117–121). After Antiochus III's defeat at Magnesia (190 bc), and facilitated by the conditions of the Peace of Apamea (188 bc), these same rulers were emboldened to assert independence. Aided and abetted by the Romans who recognized them as independent kings, they set about carving off sections of neighboring territories.

Artaxias I's dynastic successors, known in scholarship as the Artaxiads, ruled Greater Armenia until ad 12 and their history is well known from classical sources and the Armenian historiographical tradition, forming an important touchstone for later Armenian royal national identity. In contrast, the later history of the successors of Zariadres is not entirely clear. In 165 bc, Zariadres may have been forced to recognize Antiochus IV's suzerainty or at least brook his army's transit through his lands in the course of the Seleucid sovereign's punitive campaign against Artaxias I (Marciak 2017, 124–126). Zariadres's death appears to have precipitated some upheaval. The next ruler of Sophene who appears in the literary sources is Mithrobouzenes, who ruled sometime before 163 bc and may have been the son of Zariadres. Artaxias I appealed to Ariarathes IV of Cappadocia to make common cause and kill Mithrobouzenes in order to divide Sophene between them, a plot that Ariarathes rejected (Diod. 31.22).

While the Peace of Apamea allowed Sophene to maintain its independence, its terms also allowed the Seleucids to reassert control over Commagene. The treaty explicitly defined the Taurus Mountains as the northern and westernmost limits of Antiochus III's sphere of influence, suggesting that the Seleucids retained Commagene even as Sophene became independent (Polyb. 21.32–43; App., *Syr.* 38–39; Liv. 38.38). Given that Ptolemaeus, Commagene's first independent ruler, appears in our sources initially as a Seleucid governor, it is likely that at this point Commagene was constituted as a separate Seleucid province at least in name. This reincorporation into the empire, however, was short-lived.

The Independent Kingdom of Commagene

Commagene emerged as an independent kingdom in its own right around 163/162 BC when its Seleucid governor (*epistatēs*) detached the region from the Seleucid Empire and expanded its borders, capitalizing on Rome's destabilizing influence and instability in both Sophene and the Seleucid Empire following the deaths of Zariadres of Sophene and Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Around 163/162 BC Commagene's Seleucid governor, Ptolemaeus, began ruling as an independent king. Our only literary source for the event, Diodorus Siculus (31.19a), gives the impression that Ptolemaeus achieved his position as *epistatēs* under the Seleucids and perhaps held the province as governor as Zariadres and Artaxias operated as independent dynasts (Facella 2006, 206–207). Now ruling autonomously, Ptolemaeus quickly joined in with the general rapacity of this unsettled period. He invaded Cappadocia, taking Melitene until driven back over the Taurus Range by Ariarathes IV.

It is unknown whether Ptolemaeus was a member of some provincial cadet branch of the Orontids of Sophene, had married into the family, was a eunuch like the founder of the Pergamene kingdom, or simply fabricated the dynastic claim after he had detached the province from Sophene, though all are conceivable scenarios. Our main source of evidence of Orontid dynastic history comes from Antiochus of Commagene's ancestor stelae at Nemrud Dağı supplemented by coins and scattered literary sources. The twelfth ancestor stela from Nemrud Dağı, which would have contained Ptolemaeus's predecessor, is missing from the line of Antiochus I's paternal ancestors. In fact, the only possible attestations of Ptolemaeus in the epigraphic evidence from Commagene, that is, the inscription from Gerger and the thirteenth ancestor stela from Nemrud Dağı, are also highly damaged (Facella 2006, 201).

The next generation quickly set out consolidating dynastic claims and making strategic marriage alliances. Ptolemaeus's successors, Samus II (ca. 130 BC) and Mithradates I Callinicus (100–70 BC) carry Iranian names, suggesting a deliberate reassertion of an Orontid and Persian identity. Mithradates I married Laodice VII Thea, the daughter of the Seleucid king, Antiochus VIII Gryps, which allowed the dynasty to claim Seleucid descent, while Antiochus I's marriage to Isias Philostorgos, daughter of the Cappadocian king Ariobarzanes I, allowed him to lay claim to Cappadocian's royal heritage as well. As the Armenian Empire expanded across Syria, Tigranes II absorbed the fledgling kingdom into his empire, temporarily stalling the dynasty's ambitions.

Antiochus I Theos

Facilitated by the Romans' destruction of the Armenian Empire (ca. 69 BC), Mithradates I's son and successor, Antiochus I brought the kingdom to the height of its power (Brijder 2014, 63–67; Facella 2006, 205–224). Between Tigranes II's final submission (66 BC) and the death of Mithradates VI of Pontus (63 BC), Pompey reorganized the lands of the former Armenian and Pontic empires. Around 65/64, Pompey confirmed Antiochus I in his throne and enlarged his realm to include the twin cities of Seleucia-Euphrates and Apamea. Together these were known as Zeugma for the bridge over the Euphrates by which they controlled passage between Syria and Mesopotamia (Facella 2006, 230–236). In response to this good fortune, Antiochus I added the epithet *megas* to his title. Doliche, the cult center of Zeus Dolichenus, appears to have entered Antiochus I's possession about this time as well, as attested by one of the king's cult inscriptions (Antiochus I Theos, *D*). At the same time, Antiochus underscored his connection to the founders of Samosata, Arsamea-Nymphaeus, and Arsamea-Euphrates to emphasize his filiation with the Orontids of Sophene (Antiochus I Theos, *A* and *G*). But his ambitions were much larger. Incited by Tigranes II's defeat and implying a claim to the larger Orontid-Armenian inheritance, Antiochus I adopted Tigranes II's so-called Armenian tiara as an insigne of

supreme power, which he calls "the *kitaris*." He specifically states that he was the first of his line to do so in his inscription from Sofraz Köy (*SO* 6), and he is the first king of Commagene to be portrayed wearing it on coinage.

For a brief period Antiochus I operated with a degree of autonomy between Rome and the Arsacid Empire, although maintaining it was a dangerous balancing act. Despite his official stance of friendship to Rome, proclaiming himself to be *philorhomaios* ("Friend to the Romans") in his inscriptions, Antiochus I sought to forge political and marriage alliances with the Arsacids. The Parthian destruction of Crassus's army in 53 BC seems to have motivated Antiochus to contract a marriage between his daughter Laodice and Orodes II, the Arsacid king of kings (inscription *Kb*, Karakuş). In an apparent attempt to hedge his bets during this chaotic period, Antiochus made such strategic decisions as allowing Parthian troops passage over his territory to raid Syria in 51–50 BC while notifying the Romans of the movement and accepting refugees (Cic., *Fam.* 8.10.1, 15.1–2, 4.4; for other examples, see Weiskopf 1992). This calculus allowed Antiochus I to maintain his kingdom, but his Parthian gamble ended in personal tragedy. The next Arsacid king, Phraates IV, murdered her along with his brothers and rivals for the Arsacid throne (Cass. Dio 49.20.5; Brijder 2014, 61).

From Independent Kingdom to Roman Client

After the reign of Antiochus I, Commagene was drawn irrevocably into Rome's orbit. Antiochus I's successor, Mithradates II (ca. 36–20 BC), backed Antony (Plut., *Ant.* 61). Although Octavian forgave him, at this point Commagene formally became a client kingdom with Zeugma and Doliche subject to direct Roman rule. In 29 BC Mithradates II's brother, Antiochus II, was taken to Rome, tried and executed for interrupting communications between Mithradates II and Rome (Cass. Dio 70.43.1). Mithradates II appears not to have had a direct heir. His successor, Mithradates III (20 BC –?) was his nephew, possibly the son of his brother, Antiochus II, or another unknown brother whom Mithradates II had killed (Cass. Dio 54.9.1–3). Mithradates III was succeeded by his son, Antiochus III, whose date of accession is unknown. Antiochus III's death in AD 17 ushered in a period of internal strife. The nobility and common people both sent embassies to Rome. The nobility asked for Roman rule and the people petitioned for the monarchy (Jos., *Ant*. 18.2.5 [53]; Tac., *Ann.* 42.7). Tiberius decided to put Commagene under Roman military rule, charging Germanicus with its administration, who appears to have laid the groundwork for its conversion into a province (Str. 16.2.3; Tac., *Ann.* 2.56.5; Suet., *Calig.* 14.3; Cass. Dio 59.8.2; Facella 2006, 317–318).

Caligula reversed this policy in AD 38 and restored the monarchy, confirming Antiochus III's son Antiochus IV, who had been living in Rome (Suet., *Calig.* 16.3). Perhaps in acknowledgment of this subordinate status, Antiochus IV wears only the diadem on his coinage, never the Armenian tiara (Facella 2006, 92–93). Caligula changed his mind but Claudius reconfirmed Antiochus IV's position after Caligula's assassination in AD 41 (Suet., *Calig.*16.3) and Nero enlarged his holdings to include the Cilician coast (Cass. Dio 59.8.2). Antiochus IV was an important player in Roman geopolitics and military affairs in Asia. Between AD 54 and 60 Antiochus IV participated in Rome's military and political interventions against the Parthians in their struggle over Armenia (Tac., *Ann.* 18.55.1–2; 13.7.37.1–3; 14.26.3) and contributed forces on several occasions to suppress the Jewish revolts (Jos., *BI* 2.18.9 [500] and 5.11.3 [460–464]), even winning glory for himself on the battlefield in AD 70 (Tac., *Hist*. 5.1).

The End of the Kingdom of Commagene

As the first-century frontier between the Roman and Parthian Empires coalesced in this region, the Euphrates crossings became supremely important for the Romans to defend against

Parthian incursions (Cic., *Fam.* 8.10.1; Str., *Geog*. 16.746, 749; App., *Syr.* 48; Cass. Dio 49.13; Plin., *HN* 5.86; Weiskopf 1992). Indeed, paranoia about the royal family's potential collusion with the Parthians precipitated its final incorporation into the Roman Empire in AD 72 (Jos., *Ant*. 7.7.1 [219–221]). Despite his loyal service to the Romans, Antiochus IV's great wealth and, most critically, his kingdom's strategic location on the frontier with Parthia raised suspicions and in the end the Romans found it expedient to integrate the kingdom into the empire (Speidel 2005 [2009]). In AD 72 the governor of Syria, Caesennius Paetus, accused Antiochus IV and his son of conspiring with the Parthians to rebel against Rome. Paetus invaded Commagene and although Antiochus IV put up no resistance, he sent the king in chains to Rome. Arriving in the Peloponnesus, Vespasian stopped his journey, granted him clemency, and gave him a stipend to support him and his family (Jos., *Ant*. 7.7.1–3 [227–244]). Commagene was thereafter joined administratively to the province of Syria, and Roman legions were stationed in Samosata and Zeugma to defend the Euphrates crossings (Speidel 2005 [2009]; Facella 2006, 336; Brijder 2014, 75).

Antiochus IV and his descendants lived in Rome, becoming thoroughly integrated into the Roman aristocracy, holding high office and enjoying the favor of emperors. His granddaughter, Julia Balbilla (born ad 72) was a poet and traveling companion to the emperor Hadrian and his wife Sabina, leaving an inscription on the colossi of Memnon boasting of her ancestry (Rosenmeyer 2008). Remembered primarily for his funerary monument on Athens's Mouseion Hill, his grandson, Gaius Julius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus (ad 65–116), boasted of his membership in the Arval Brotherhood, a consulship (ad 109), and praetorian rank bestowed by Trajan; as an Athenian citizen, he was honored for holding the office of *archon* and serving as a *choregos* and an *agonothetes* (*IG* II.2, 3451; *CIL* III, 552; Plut., *Moralia* 628a–b; Paus. 1.25.8; Wu 2016).

Cultural and Archaeological History of Commagene

Like Cappadocia, Pontus, and the Armenian highlands, Sophene and Commagene initially resembled an Achaemenid satrapy with royal and aristocratic estates forming the economic and infrastructural backbone and the population dispersed in villages. Their royal residences first functioned as strategically placed strongholds rather than Greek-style *poleis*. Commagene's main settlements, including Samosata, Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus, and Arsamea-on-the-Euphrates, were all founded by the Orontids of Sophene. The Orontids of Commagene embellished these sites, which served as important points of pride and evidence of dynastic continuity. In fact, the only major Orontid royal residences that the later independent kingdom of Commagene did not encompass were Arsamosata and Arg(i)athicerta/Carcathaiocerta (mod. Eğil), the site of the royal necropolis of the Orontids of Sophene (Str. 11.14.2; Plin., *HN* 6.10.26; Ptol., *Geog.* 5.13.22; *Buzandaran* 4.24, trans. Garsoïan 1989, 157; Canepa 2018, 112 and 227–229).

The personal names and toponyms of the royal foundations of the Orontids of Sophene accentuated their Persian dynastic claims and Iranian cultural roots. They bore names such as Xerxes and Arsames (Old Persian Ṛšāma, "he who has the strength of heroes"), which was a common name within the Achaemenid family and among Persian elite. Samus possibly derived from the Avestan Sāma, father of the Avestan hero Kərəsāspa, which would attest to some tradition of Iranian religious or epic lore within the family (cf. *Yašt* 13.136; Justi 1895, 280–281). Moreover, naming cities as the "joy of" or "happiness of" the founder was a characteristically Orontid-Artaxiad practice evoking Achaemenid traditions, and it occurs as a

pattern in several foundations, such as Samosata (Mid. Persian/Parthian *Sāmašād, Old Persian *Sāma-šiyāti-; Canepa 2018, 109).

Although the Orontids of Sophene foregrounded Persian onomastic and architectural traditions, they did not reuse sites tied to Achaemenid (or Seleucid) satrapal rule as their main residences. None of the Orontids' major settlements were continuously occupied from the Achaemenid through the early Hellenistic period. This holds true within both Sophene and Commagene. For example, if it had been advantageous to them, the early Orontids of Sophene could have rebuilt or reoccupied Tille Höyük, a site that preserved a significant Achaemenid-era manor house. Instead it was abandoned after Alexander's invasion, only later growing into a small frontier village, but never a royal residence (Blaylock 2009, 157 and 171–212). Instead, the Orontids chose new sites for royal residences to consolidate an independent royal identity. In this they followed a remarkably similar strategy as their dynastic forebears in Greater Armenia (Canepa 2018, 98–104).

Samosata was founded sometime in the mid-third century bc on the site of Neo-Hittite Kummuḫ. The archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence all point to a foundation by Samus (I) of Sophene, whom Antiochus of Commagene names as the grandfather of Arsames I in a fragmentary inscription (*OGIS* 394; Memnon *FGrH* 434 F 14.1; Cohen 2006, 187–189; Schottky 2006; cf. Facella 2006, 172–173). The ancient site of Samosata now lies under the waters of the reservoir of the Atatürk Dam. But before the waters rose, two seasons of salvage excavations were conducted (Özgüç 1986; 1987; 1996; Canepa 2021; Kruijer and Riedel 2021). Since it controlled an important crossing on the Euphrates, Samosata had a long occupation history, and the site revealed numerous levels stretching back to the Bronze Age with the excavator and later interpreters identifying a variable number of levels. Özgüç (2009) saw some thirty levels stretching back to the Chalcolithic period while Zoroğlu (2012) in his re-examination lists fifteen layers. Significantly, however, despite such discrepancies the excavator and later interpreters all agree that there is a gap between the Assyrian and early Hellenistic/Orontid levels with no significant Achaemenid remains (Özgüç 1996). Although initially identifying a layer distinguished by orthostated walls, an altar, and courtyard as Achaemenid, after further excavation and study, the site's excavators revised their initial working hypothesis and conclusively assigned it to the Hellenistic period (Özgüç 1996, 213; 2009, 41–46; Canepa 2018, 102–103).

Above this layer, the excavators documented a later palace built in the early Hellenistic period, which used an archaic limestone orthostat treatment of the walls and torus bases to evoke Achaemenid architecture (Mellink 1984, 449; Özgüç 1996, 214; 2009, 46–48, plans 13–14, plate 119.258–259 and plate 120.260a–b). Its use of "sub-Achaemenid" Persian architectural forms is conceptually continuous with post-Achaemenid Orontid structures in Greater Armenia, as is the palace's location at a site of ancient significance without satrapal connotations. Still more, Samosata evinces an analogous pattern of development when compared to Arsamosata in Sophene. Founded in the mid- to late third century bc by Arsames, son of Samus I, it too had a similar gap between the Urartian and Hellenistic occupations (Öğün 1971; 1972; Tirats'yan 2003, 131). The Orontid kings of Commagene built a palace at Samosata in the first century bc, which was decorated with rich mosaics and frescos (Özgüç 2009, 41–46, plates 101–116; Zoroğlu 2012). Like similar architecture in Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus the later Hellenistic palace of the Orontids of Commagene imposed a rather abrupt shift in architectural style emblematic of the later dynasty's close entanglement with the contemporary Graeco-Roman world (Canepa 2018, 109–110).

According to the inscriptions of Antiochus I of Commagene, Arsames founded fortified settlements at Arsamea-Euphrates (present-day Gerger) and Arsamea-Nymphaeus (Eski Kale), a building campaign that took place during Arsames's rebellion from Seleucus II (Facella 2006,

174–175). The most significant remains from these sites date to the first century BC when they became important fortresses and ritual centers for the first-century Orontid sovereigns of the kingdom of Commagene. Although occupied in the Middle Bronze Age, Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus did not host an important settlement in the Achaemenid period. The site hosted an elite palace or villa in the early Hellenistic period whose remains were subsequently built over or integrated into late Hellenistic and Roman buildings (Hoepfner 1983, 79–83). Much like the early Orontid palace at Samosata, the Orontid structure used simple Achaemenid-style torus bases suggesting that Arsames made use of "Persianizing" architectural forms in establishing his new royal identity (Hoepfner 1983, 6–7; 2000, 58; Dörner and Goell 1963, 175–184).

Arsamea-on-the-Euphrates has not received as much attention as Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus. The site was only cursorily surveyed by the early twentieth-century expedition (Dörner et al. 1939, 86–91; Waldmann 1973, 123–141; Sanders 1996, 1:175–377). Nevertheless, this settlement fits the pattern of Arsames's other foundations: it is a virtually impregnable fortress set atop a flat-topped rocky outcrop. We know from an inscription at the site that it hosted the tomb and sanctuary of Antiochus I's grandfather, Samus II, and a sanctuary of a goddess called Argadene (Antiochus I, *G* 50). A small number of ossuary niches carved into the cliff face hint at elite inhabitants who adhered to Iranian mortuary strictures. In order to make this dynastic connection tangible, Antiochus of Commagene carved a rock relief of his grandfather (Canepa 2018, 111). As it is unexcavated, we do not know about the nature of Arsames I's original constructions at the site, though its scale, the funerary niches, and the monumental rock relief that Antiochus carved into its cliffs indicate that it was a significant settlement.

Antiochus I's Cult Reforms and Dynastic Sanctuaries

Commagene's most distinctive archaeological features come from the reign of Antiochus I. Antiochus I designed a new official cult that foregrounded Iranian deities and religious traditions, though not necessarily consonant with later "orthodox" Zoroastrianism as it coalesced under the Sasanians and solidified in the Middle Ages (Canepa 2018, 240–248; 2021; de Jong 2021). Antiochus introduced a new state pantheon of culturally complex deities who were identified, and in most cases portrayed visually, in both Greek and Iranian idioms: Zeus-Oromasdes, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, Artaganes-Heracles-Ares, and the Tyche of Commagene. The cult protocol (*nomos*) that Antiochus I instituted honored the gods of Commagene, himself, and, secondarily, his Persian and Macedonian ancestors. It demanded that the inhabitants of Commagene go the nearest sanctuary (*temenos*) to celebrate the anniversaries of the king's birthday and coronation. The members of the priesthood he established were meant to celebrate these events monthly in addition to the two large yearly festivals. The cult protocol does not resemble Zoroastrian rituals known from the late antique period; however, the cult's general outlines and their open-air installations parallel contemporary Armenian Zoroastrianism and religious practices. Just as important, Antiochus I himself understood that he established the cultic institutions on Persian models and portrayed the pantheon and its cult as arising from his ancestors' "ancient knowledge." Given the makeup of the new pantheon and parallels between Commagene's cult rituals and those of Orontid-Artaxiad Armenia, it is probable that Antiochus I drew on some lingering familial memories. But it is equally likely that he "filled in the blanks" with contemporary religious practices within Anatolia and the Caucasus and, possibly, the Parthian Empire. The open-air sanctuaries of Orontid and Artaxiad kings of Armenia, which included statues of the gods, the king, and his ancestors, likely provided the most powerful and dynastically significant precedent. Although Antiochus I's conception of Persian religion derived from contemporary Iranian religious

traditions within Anatolia and the Caucasus, the sites' basic constituents and many of the cult terms and practices engaged contemporary ruler cults, regionally and across the Iranian world (Canepa 2018, 202–203 and 248).

FIGURE 28.2. View of the east terrace of Antiochus I's *hierothesion* and tomb (Nemrud Dağı, Turkey). © Matthew P. Canepa.

FIGURE 28.3. Relief stela portraying Antiochus I clasping hands with Artaganes-Heracles-Ares, *hierothesion* of Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus (Eski Kale, Turkey). © Matthew P. Canepa.

FIGURE 28.4. View from Arsamea-on-the-Euphrates with relief portraying Samus II and inscription of Antiochus I (Gerger, Turkey). © Matthew P. Canepa.

Antiochus I built sanctuaries throughout his kingdom for his newly instituted dynastic cult (Br ijder 2014, 83–163; Canepa 2018, 240–248). These were divided between sites that hosted what he termed an *hierothesion*, the supreme cult sites collocated with a royal funerary monument, and a simple *temenos*, which were much more numerous and located throughout the kingdom. Two of the major *hierothesia*, the king's own mountaintop funerary monument at Nemrud Dağı and his father's at Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus, are known archaeologically, although the *hierothesia* at Arsamea-on-the-Euphrates and many of the smaller *temenē* are attested only epigraphically (figs. 28.2–28.4). Most of these open-air sanctuaries shared similar characteristics, such as altars, cult images, and inscriptions, though not all were built to the same monumental scale and only the *hierothesia* were collocated at tombs. Antiochus I's own funerary monument centered on the king's colossal funerary tumulus, as did a tomb for the royal women at Karakuş built by Mithradates II, which did not, however, seem to host a cult site (fig. 28.5). Antiochus I's father's tomb at Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus appears to have been in either the rock-cut hall or cave, while the bones of Samus II were likely interred in one of the rock-cut niches in the cliff side at Arsamea-on-the-Euphrates. Nemrud Dağı and Arsamea-on-the-Nymphaeus both featured colossal cult statues arranged around altars and numerous inscribed relief stelae portraying divinities, the king, or the king clasping hands with

the gods. These flanked the main altars or lined the processional ways that led to and through the cult sites.

FIGURE 28.5. Tumulus of the royal women with pillar and stela, Karakuş, Turkey. © Matthew P. Canepa.

Although evidence is sparse, it appears that Commagene's first three kings deliberately conformed their religious traditions to those of the Seleucids. Some have speculated that an early cult inscription from Sofraz Köy might provide us with a glimpse of a pre-Antiochan-reform dynastic pantheon, which centered on Apollo Epēkoos and Artemis Diktynna (Crowther and Facella 2003). Moreover, after Rome's absorption of the kingdom, sanctuaries built in the region appear to return to this pre-reform cult, venerating Apollo and Artemis in an unmixed state (Brijder 2014, 421–423). If these indeed reflect the original cult, the choice of Apollo and Artemis would suggest that Antiochus I's immediate predecessors sought to reinforce their new Seleucid dynastic connections, perhaps even providing a precedent for Antiochus I's dramatic, politically motivated shifts in religion and royal identity. Even so, Antiochus I's efforts to renew, or perhaps better, reinvent Commagene's Iranian religious traditions are even more remarkable. The sculptural style and iconographies of the colossal cult statues, reliefs, and stelae of Antiochus I's *hierothesia* and *temenē* are deliberate neoconservative inventions intended to impart a sense of antiquity and grandeur to his new cult and royal claims. While the iconographies and cult appropriated and reinterpreted aspects of Orontid Armenian and Parthian traditions, the artistic program was not an outgrowth of a timeless "oriental" or Persian tradition nor the barbarous creations of imperfectly "Hellenized" natives, as an earlier tradition of scholarship often interpreted it (Versluys 2017, 185–219 and 249–254; Hauser 2021). Instead, Antiochus I's program was a "newly ancient" invention analogous to the programs

of other late Hellenistic dynasts who were equally intent on rooting their newly formed kingdoms in a prestigious past and making that past visible and interpretable to external audiences (Kropp 2013). Indeed, the primary audience for these grand, monumental, and cultic statements was not the inhabitants of Commagene, who abandoned Antiochus I's creations unfinished immediately after his death, and to whom his new monuments might have even appeared as eccentric and outlandish impositions on their religious landscape and life (Canepa 2021, 95–97). Rather, they were directed to rival dynasts in the region and primarily to the great powers who lay in rapacious wait to the east and west: the Arsacids and Romans.

Conclusion: The Place of Commagene in the Hellenistic World

Scholarship has often described Commagene as lying between "East" and "West"; however, as this chapter has demonstrated, "East" and "West," "Greek" and "Persian" were not stable or monolithic cultural or political siloes. Similar to those of the Ariarathids of Cappadocia and Mithradatids of Pontus, the Orontids' conjoined Perso-Macedonian lineages and traditions reflected the aspirations of ambitious sovereigns just as much as regional histories. The later Orontids of Commagene were certainly conscious of occupying an important, though precarious, place between the Graeco-Roman and Iranian worlds culturally and politically, yet an opposition between these cultural and political spheres came into high relief only with Rome's destruction of the Pontic and Armenian empires and the encroachment of Parthia. The Orontids, more often than not, succeeded in deftly navigating and resolving these seemingly impossible diplomatic and military situations in their favor. The artistic, cultic, and diplomatic initiatives that Antiochus I in particular spearheaded responded to the opportunities and anxieties of this volatile period. Despite the kingdom's small size, its advantageous geographical position, wealth, and the shrewd diplomacy exercised by many of its rulers enabled it to make an outsize impact on the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia in the late Hellenistic and early Roman imperial periods.

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CHAPTER 29

EDESSA (FOURTH CENTURY BC TO THE EIGHTH CENTURY AD)

HARTMUT LEPPIN

Hellenistic-Parthian Period

By Syrian standards, Edessa was a young city. Although it was never a powerful political center, it is noteworthy for its distinct cultural identity and its intellectual influence as the main urban center of Syriac learning in late antiquity (Kirsten 1959; Segal 1970; Ross 2001; Sommer 2018, 227–271). Syriac, the local dialect of Aramaic, developed into a standard literary language that became the lingua franca of the Middle East from the fourth to eighth centuries (Gzella 2014, esp. 366–378). Thus, Edessa's cultural clout was much greater than its political power.

The city was located in a hilly region to the north of a vast plain surrounded by mountains on three sides. Springs, pools, and the River Daiṣān (Skirtos) contributed to the abundance of water in the city, which, as a consequence, frequently suffered inundations, some causing extreme damage. About 80 km to the west, the loop of the Euphrates formed a natural frontier to the north and west. From an Edessene perspective, the Euphrates River crossing at nearby Zeugma was extremely important because of its access to routes to the Mediterranean Sea. Greeks and Romans mostly referred to the region of Edessa as Osrhoene.

Edessa was famous for its fertile soil, a striking contrast to the surrounding steppes. It was also situated at an important road junction. Busy trade routes between north and south, east and west converged here. Although Edessa never became a crucial political player in its own right, major powers could not afford to ignore it, for both strategic and economic reasons.

Assyrian sources hint that a settlement named Adme was the predecessor of Edessa (Harrak 1992). The Aramaic name Orhay and the Arabic version Ar-Ruha are possibly based on its pre-Greek name. Seleucus I Nicator named it Edessa after the Macedonian city, also known for its abundant water supply, when he settled veterans here about 303 bc (Ioh. Mal. 17.15). The city was later renamed Antiocheia on the Callirhoe (or simply Callirhoe), as first attested on bronze coins of Antiochus IV (175–164 bc) minted in Edessa (Tubach 2009, 295–311). The coins are most easily accessible in Houghton and Lorber 2002, 1:1149–1151 (for possible coinage under Antioch I 1:361–362 and under Antioch III 1:1120–1125).

The city rose to greater prominence when the Seleucid Empire lost its influence in the regions east of the Euphrates after Antiochus VII Euergetes was defeated by the Parthian ruler Phraates II (130/129). Smaller political entities emerged, including Edessa, which was ruled by ʿAbdu bar Mazʿur, who was Arabic of ancestry and who had come to power about 132. His dynasty, which was to last for almost four centuries, is usually called Abgarid because the name of Abgar was frequent in this family, although the name Maʿnu also occurred quite often. Roman sources referred to the rulers as toparchs or phylarchs (Procop., *Pers*. 2.2.8; cf. Fest., *Brev*. 14.1; Plut., *Crass*. 21.1).

The principality of Osrhoene had to accommodate the major players: the Seleucids, the Parthians, the Armenians, and Rome. Although the Edessenes made the wrong choice more often than not, their city survived and remained relatively prosperous due to its geographical

location. During the first decades of Edessa's independence, the Parthian Empire was the dominating power in this part of Syria, but Tigranes II of Armenia (95–55 BC) brought Osrhoene under his control while the Abgarid dynasty remained in office formally.

Roman influence was heavily felt from the first century BC, although initially it brought no fundamental change to Edessa. Pompey accepted Abgar II Piqā (75/74–49) as the sovereign of Edessa.[1] Ancient Roman sources, however, depict the ruler of Edessa, perhaps another Abgar, as a traitor who led the Romans into a trap that caused their traumatic defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC (Plut., *Crass* 21–22; Cass. Dio 40.20–23). As the "perfidy" of Arab leaders is a stereotype in Roman literature, it is difficult to gauge how reliable these accounts and others like them are. Parthian influence dominated the region after the Battle of Carrhae, but no details are known about this period of Edessene history.

Between Parthia and Rome

Edessa's relations to Parthia and Rome appear mostly peaceful during the first centuries AD (Segal 1970, 12–15). Even though the connections with Parthia seem to have been closer, the few sources we do have are Roman and they obviously focus on crises. Abgar V Uqqāmā (the Black; AD 22–25; AD 31/32–65/66) is the first Edessene ruler to be attested as king. Tacitus accuses him of fraud when, in 49, he systematically delayed the arrival of Mihrdat, the Roman nominee for the throne of Armenia, before finally deserting him (Tac., *Ann*. 12.12.2–3, cf. 12.14.1). Another story of treason is told about Abgar VII (110–116): when Roman–Parthian relations were strained under Emperor Trajan (98–117), the Edessene king strongly asserted his loyalty to Rome, albeit relatively late. His envoys successfully assured Trajan of their king's friendship and apologized for his tardiness due to his fear of the Parthians, who had installed him on the throne. Abgar himself entertained Trajan profusely when he stayed in Edessa (Cass. Dio 68.18.1, 21). Soon after, in 116, the Edessenes participated in a rebellion against Rome. Trajan retaliated swiftly, his troops under the command of Lusius Quietus conquering and pillaging Edessa (Cass. Dio 68.30).

The political realities must have invited the Edessene rulers to rely on see-saw politics in order to survive and gain as many advantages as possible, although this sometimes resulted in the opposite effect. However, it was also arduous for the Romans to control the region by direct rule, which meant that for a long time they preferred client-kings and thus backed individual rulers.

Turbulent years followed. The city remained in the hands of the Romans until Trajan's death. Hadrian made Osrhoene a client state of Rome. An Arsacid prince seems to have reigned until 125/126 when Maʿnu VII bar Izaṭ (125/126–165/166) from the Abgarid dynasty took control. He was close to Rome. However, in the 160s Wa'el, an ally of the Parthians, toppled Maʿnu. He started minting coins with Aramaic inscriptions and portraits of the Parthian ruler (see fig. 29.1; Drijvers and Healey 1999, Co1 and Co2; Hill, 1922, 91–118). But another Maʿnu was soon reinstalled. His coins proclaimed his loyalty to Rome and displayed Greek inscriptions, the epithet *philorhomaios* included, as well as a portrait of the Roman emperor (Günther 2021).

FIGURE 29.1. Edessene coin of Wa'el with Vologaeses III (105–147) and Aramaic inscription. Courtesy of CNG Coins, auction 357, lot 187.

During the Roman civil war of 193/194, Abgar VIII bar Maʿnu (177/178–212) seems to have attempted to gain more independence, but in vain (Possekel 2016). Instead, the Romans installed a *procurator Augusti* responsible for what was called Provincia Osrhoena which somehow seems to have coexisted with the *Regnum Abgari* (*Année epigraphique* 1984.919–920, with Speidel 2007). Still, Abgar not only retained his throne but also received Roman citizenship, bearing the imperial *nomen gentile*. This honor was also a sign of dependency. Significantly, Abgar had to provide his children as hostages and archers as auxiliary troops (Hdn. 3.9.2). From then on, he remained loyal to the Roman cause even when the Parthians seemed to be in the ascendant. He was duly honored by Septimius Severus and even invited to Rome (Cass. Dio 80.16.2). Under Caracalla, the city of Edessa became a Roman *colonia*. Osrhoene was ruled as a Roman province and left without a king. Yet, from 239 to 241/242, in a time of renewed Parthian attacks, another Aelius Septimius Abgar, son of a Maʿnu with the title *paṣgrībā* (vice-king), seems to have acted as king, also minting coins (see fig. 29.2). After him, the monarchy came to an end, formally perhaps only in 248 (Teixidor 1990, 160–163; Luther 1999a). It is remarkable that the Abgarid dynasty survived so many conflicts, tribulations, and mistakes.

FIGURE 29.2. Edessene coin of Gordian III (238–244) and Abgar, son of a Maʿnu with Greek inscription. Image courtesy of Leu Numismatik AG, web auction 2, lot 527.

In 201 a great flood wrought havoc on Edessa. The description of the destruction gives us an impression of the splendor of the city at the time, with a large and beautiful palace that was rebuilt as a summer palace while a winter palace was erected on the citadel (*Chronicon Edessenum* 1 [8]). Two columns still in situ must have belonged to a major building, perhaps the palace. In the fourth century, Aetheria (Egeria) admires the splendor of the palace (19.6–7).

The rulers of Edessa primarily portrayed themselves in the manner of Parthian kings as can be gleaned from their attire. Similarly, the administrative organization of Edessa followed the Iranian model and not that of Mediterranean cities (Segal 1970, 18–23; Sommer 2018, 255–258). The relatively systematic description I offer here, however, is based on few sources and will obscure changes that happened over time. The most important officer, the viceroy, was called (with a Parthian title) *paṣgrībā*. The *nūhadrā* seems to have been a military commander whereas the *gezīrāyē* apparently were city watchmen. The *šarrīrē* (faithful men) served as special commissioners. Villages belonged to the territory of Edessa as well as zones with a semi-nomadic or nomadic population. The *shalliṭa dʿarab* (Greek *arabarchos*) was probably in charge of them (Sommer 2018, 256–257). The archives of the city of Edessa enjoyed a high reputation even outside the city (Adler 2013, 48–52). They testify to a functioning administration.

Members of the local aristocracy, entitled to wear a tiara, are mentioned occasionally, especially as advisors to the king. Tomb towers (used by the royal dynasty) and cave tombs were used to demonstrate the wealth of important families. Colorful mosaics in the cave tombs and in the city usually display Syriac inscriptions. All of them presumably date from 218 to 238 (Drijvers and Healey 1999, 37–38); however, there continue to be new finds (see, e.g., Healey 2019). Portraits are in a frontal mode, which is interpreted as the result of Parthian influence. Yet some themes must have appeared familiar to Greek onlookers, such as funeral banquets and mythological scenes. Those works of art are a testament to the cultural openness of the elite during this time. The skills of archery and hunting seem to have been held in high esteem.

Apart from the aristocracy, free artisans appear to have played a public role, too. It goes without saying that slaves lived in Edessa, as attested in third-century documents (Drijvers P 1 = P.Dura 28; P.Euphr. 6/7).

A hippodrome, the origin of which was attributed to Augustus, theatrical performances, and baths were among the amenities of Edessa, which was famous for its wealth. Some of the mansions of the nobles must have been magnificent. Public streets were lined with porticoes.

Edessa's population was ethnically diverse during this period, but usually perceived by the Romans as being Arabic. The inscriptions, however, convey the impression that a revival of the Syriac language took place during the first centuries ad (Drijvers and Healey 1999, 33) although Greek was also in use (Millar 2015, 553–630) and some clues suggest the existence of Hellenic education in Edessa at this time (Drijvers 1995). Bilingual Osrhoene developed a cultural identity of its own. Abgar IX bar Maʿnu made his court a cultural center where intellectuals could thrive. For example, Bardaiṣan, a Middle Platonic philosopher and Christian writing in Syriac assembled a group of pupils with whom he debated philosophical problems. The *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, which depicts him as the foremost interlocutor in a dialogue, gives us an idea of his influence. Although later generations condemned him as a heretic, his hymns were in use at least until the fifth century (Ramelli 2009). Iulius Africanus, a well-known Grecophone Christian scholar, attended this court as well.

Pagan cults in Edessa are indicators of the heavy influence of non-Greek traditions. The Edessenes worshipped Syrian-Mesopotamian deities, such as Atargatis, Nebo, or Bel (Drijvers 1980; Ross 2001, 85–100). Pools used to keep sacred fish still survive today. Difficult to define is Marilaha ("lord god"), who may have been the highest god, perhaps identical with the moon god Sin (Segal 1970, 57–60). Abgar is said to have put an end to the cult of Astargate, which included castration (Bardaiṣan, *Laws of the Countries* p. 59Dr; Euseb., *Praep. Ev.* 6.44). Apart from mythological representations on mosaics, Graeco-Roman cults are not attested in Edessa.

There are several references to Edessene Jews, mostly in polemical Christian contexts (Kirsten 1959, 566–568). The Abgar legend presupposes a large Jewish presence in Edessa. The cemeteries have yielded Hebrew inscriptions. At least one synagogue is attested. Jews were regarded as pro-Parthian in the time of Trajan (which must be seen in connection with the diaspora revolt in the Roman Empire).

Christianity was influential in Edessa from a relatively early time, if not from the beginning as Edessenes maintained a specific character (Tubach 2015), which included a Christian elite culture (Adler 2017). The Abgar dynasty claimed to have a special relationship to Jesus Christ. Eusebius, who states that he used documents from the archives of Edessa, is the first to tell the story. According to him, a King Abgar—usually identified as Abgar V the Black—was severely ill and asked for Jesus to heal him. Via a letter, Jesus announced that a disciple would come to Edessa. After Jesus's ascension, the apostle Thomas sent Thaddaeus (Addai) to the city to spread the Christian faith, preaching before the city's entire population. He healed the king and performed more miracles (*Hist. eccl.* 1.13). Later versions that refer to the story of Thaddaeus (Addai), of which the *Doctrina Addai* (early fifth century) is the most prominent, added that Abgar received a portrait of Jesus. Edessenes used to show a portrait of Jesus on a cloth, regarded as the *vera icon*, which became the most famous depiction of the Savior, the Mandylion. It is obvious that this story served the purpose of bestowing an apostolic tradition upon Edessa and proving that Edessa was already a foremost Christian city in the apostolic tradition.

During late antiquity, Christ's letter was inscribed at the city gate. It was supposed to protect the city against barbarian conquests. However, Christianity certainly did not become the official religion of Edessa before Constantine, not even under Abgar IX as is sometimes claimed. But it did rise to prominence relatively early. The flood of 201 also destroyed a Christian community

building as is suggested by the *Chronicon Edessenum* (1 [8]), which might be interpolated, however. In a sense, Christian Edessa could be viewed as the counterpart of pagan Harran (Carrhae).

Possibly, Caracalla exerted pressure on Christian members of the local elites (Andrade 2019). Nevertheless, there are few martyrs securely attested in Edessa. Some villagers died under Diocletian (Shmōnā, Guryā, and Ḥabbīb; see Ashbrook Harvey 1990). Only in the late fourth century or later, Aetheria (Egeria) mentions numerous places where martyrs were commemorated (19.4). Still later, the *Acts of Sharbil and of Barsamya* circulated among Syriac Christians, which vividly—if unreliably—speak of the sufferings of noble martyrs in Edessa under Trajan (Rist 2009; Greisinger 2009). In earlier times, however, the educated Christians were apparently able to come to an arrangement with the pagan elite, as at Abgar's court. Christianity in Edessa seems to have been more accommodating and better received by the elite than elsewhere, at least during the time when Edessa was autonomous (Camplani 2011).

The early bishops of Edessa remain obscure figures. Paluţ is the first bishop to be reasonably well attested in Edessa. He was regarded as orthodox in the Nicene tradition (Kirsten 1959, 569–571; Griffith 2002). Later sources, such as the *Vita of Rabbula*, suggest that members of the local elite were the leading figures among Edessene Christians.

In the Roman Empire

Being located close to the Roman–Persian border, Edessa became a major stronghold of Roman rule and was often affected by the vicissitudes of the Roman–Persian conflicts. Although the city resisted sieges for centuries, Persian attacks again and again devastated the countryside. The presence of a Roman garrison and of troops billeted in the city enhanced the burdens of war further still. Moreover, the city was repeatedly hit by natural disasters, mostly floods. Despite this, Edessa remained famous for its cultural and economic wealth.

For some years after the end of the monarchy, Edessa still issued coins as a *colonia*, the last ones being minted under Decius (249–251) (Ross 2001, 158–162). In 259/260, Shapur I laid siege to Edessa. The Battle of Edessa in 260 ended in a crushing defeat for the Romans, with Emperor Valerian himself among the captives (Mosig-Walburg 2009, 44–47). Subsequently, Edessa came under Palmyrene hegemony for some years. The Roman tetrarchs stabilized the region after Galerius's victory against the Persians in 298. During late antiquity, the province of Osrhoene was part of the Diocese of *Oriens*. The *dux Osrhoenae* had his office in Edessa.

The city's strategic importance must not be underestimated even though Mesopotamia, with Amida as its capital, became a separate province under Diocletian. Edessa served as a crucial logistical center, especially for Amida and Nisibis, both of which were virtually on the frontier (e.g., Amm. Marc. 20.11.4, 21.7.7). An arms factory was established under Diocletian (Ioh. Mal. 12.38; Notitia Dignitatum, Oriens 11.23). Unlike before, the Edessenes stayed loyal to the Roman cause, which soon came to be regarded as the Christian cause. Although Persia was close, Edessa was not directly affected by war during the fourth and fifth centuries. It also avoided involvement in the civil war between Leontius and Zeno.

The social structures of Edessa apparently did not change fundamentally, but the nobles would now meet in a curia, being obliged to engage in public functions. Some of the nobles led an extremely luxurious lifestyle (Segal 1970, 146–147). The gulf between the prosperous and the poor remained deep. When a famine broke out in 373, Ephrem the Syrian is said to have used harsh words to exhort the rich to share their food (*Vita* 23). Ps.-Joshua Stylite painted a graphic picture of the suffering of the poor during a famine (500/501).

In contrast to Nisibis, Edessa remained Roman after the treaty with Persia of 363. Many inhabitants of the conquered city flocked to Edessa. The Romans' loss of Nisibis meant that Edessa was now more exposed to Persian military attacks and the decurions had to contribute substantially to the costs of defense (Cod. Theod. 12.1.79; 12.1.105; Cod. Iust. 12.57.5). The legend of Euphemia and the Goth illustrates how strained the relationship between the city and the soldiers was (Kee 2021).

Though ruled by Rome, Edessa preserved a strong local identity (Kee 2021) and the city's cultural life remained distinct. As a center of asceticism and of learning, the city attracted migrants from Persia, Armenia, and elsewhere (Becker 2013, 66–68). It was a center of historiography (Debié 2015, 165–184). Ephrem the Syrian, who was among the refugees from Nisibis, is connected to the founding of the so-called School of the Persians, but his exact role remains unclear. As its name shows, the school's reputation and influence reached beyond the Roman Empire. Presumably, it favored the standardization of the Syriac language. Schools of the Syrians and the Armenians are also mentioned (Becker 2013, 41–76). The teachings from these schools contributed significantly to the demarcation of theologies that became regarded as orthodox or heretic, such as Bardaiṣanites, Marcionites, and Manichaeans. The schools also formed the context for translations of pagan works such as Aristotle's *Organon* or Porphyry's *Isagoge* into Syriac.

Christianity became the predominant religion in Edessa during late antiquity (for Edessene Christianity in the fourth century, see Fiano 2015) and a growing number of church buildings, some richly adorned, made this visible (Keser-Kayaalp 2021, 49–65). Many nobles gave expensive donations to the churches. The *Peregrinatio Aetheriae (Egeriae)* gives us an idea of other renowned Christian sites in Edessa, which apparently had become an important destination for pilgrimages (17.2). In fact, the region boasted the remains of several saints. Over time, many of them were brought within the city walls, including those of Thomas, transferred in 394 (*Chronicon Edessenum* 38).

During late antiquity, the bishops became more conspicuous (as in many places). Aithallaha attended the Council of Nicaea in 325. He was seen in the tradition of Paluţ and of Qune (ca. 300), who was credited with founding the main church. Yet Christianity seems to have been rather fragmented in Edessa during the fourth century. There were various groups and also an early Manichaean community that received a letter from Mani himself (CMC 64 f.). They were also in close contact with Christians beyond their borders, especially those in Persia. Julian (361–363) reprimanded Edessene Christians for their conflicts and took away the possessions of the church in order to help them live in poverty, as he says with his usual sarcasm (*Ep*. 115 Bid).

When Ephrem arrived in Edessa, he seems to have perceived the city as a center of heresies and set out to fight passionately against those who did not share his convictions (Griffith 1999). Emperor Valens allegedly made an attempt to expel Nicene Christians. However, they were later allowed to return. The *Vita of Rabbula* mentions Manichaeans, Messalians, Marcionites, Borborites, Audians, and Bardaiṣanites in Edessa (40–42). Seemingly, the *Doctrina Addai* intended to highlight the apostolic origins of one probably episcopal Christian group in Edessa. Among the most potent enemies of "true" Christian faith attacked in this text are the Manichaeans and the Jews (Griffith 2003; Desreumaux 2009).

The Christological controversies of the fifth century had a heavy impact on Edessa. During the Nestorian controversy, Bishop Rabbula (411–435/436) was among the few allies of Cyrillus of Alexandria in Syria (Blum 1969; Drijvers 1996; Phenix and Horn 2017, xvii–xxviii). The sources dealing with Rabbula provide a colorful, if one-sided idea of Christian life in Edessa (Do erfler 2019; Leppin 2020). Apparently, aristocrats held a strong position there. The adherents of Bardaiṣan as well as other Christian groups condemned as heretics by the majority of

Christians in the Roman Empire were still influential. Rabbula is described as a bishop who set out to turn his city into an ascetic community, which, however, also provided for the poor and the sick. The symbols of aristocratic engagement in the church, such as the donation of valuables, were removed. The *Vita* presents caring for the sick and the poor as Rabbula's central concern. Rabbula attempted to homogenize the entire population. He suppressed all Christian groups he regarded as heretics and translated the New Testament from Greek into Syriac. According to the *Chronicon Edessenum* referring to 411/412, the bishop also built a church of St. Stephen in the place of a synagogue at the behest of the emperor (51).

Two sets of rules for parts of the ascetic lifestyle are ascribed to Rabbula, one relating to the monks, the other to the clerics and to the *bnay qeyāmā*, the children of the covenant. They formed a group of men and women characteristic of Syria who devoted their life to ascetic practices but were allowed to live with, or close to, their families. Although differing in details, the rules shared a common underlying principle, their aim being to make the ascetics subordinate to the bishop, restricting their mobility and their opportunities to entertain contacts with the outside world (Griffith 1995, 229–234).

All of this suggests that asceticism was an essential aspect of late antique Edessa. The legend of St. Alexius of Edessa, the scion of a noble family who tried to hide his holy, ascetic life, was widely known even in the West during the Middle Ages. It testifies to the prestige of Edessa as a center of asceticism (Drijvers 1996).

Rabbula's success was certainly limited, as demonstrated by the election of Hiba, who was an adherent of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the key theological figure of Rabbula's opponents. Some sources describe Hiba as an influential teacher at the school of Edessa, who had works of Theodore of Mopsuestia translated into Syriac (Kavvadas 2015a). He also opted for a more aristocratic lifestyle, but met strong resistance in his diocese. The accusations against him extended to corruption. Although he was found innocent by the patriarch of Antioch and by an imperial commission, they ordered him to show more restraint and to publicly condemn Nestorius. On his return to Edessa, he found his city in turmoil. The governor, being under the influence of Hiba's opponents, imprisoned him. He was formally deposed as bishop by the second council of Ephesus, the so-called *latrocinium* (robber council), in 449 but reinstalled by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 after condemning Nestorius. The *Acts* of the *latrocinium* paint a vivid picture of the conflicts in Edessa itself, which involved not only clerics and monks, but also magistrates and artisans. The people's opinion on this was divided. There were still those who acclaimed Rabbula (Rammelt 2009).

Our sources may exaggerate the contrast between Rabbula the ascetic and Hiba the scholar. Nevertheless, they are representatives of two starkly different alternatives. When Hiba finally returned to Edessa in 451, he seems to have met no resistance (but information about this time is scarce).

After Hiba's death in 457, however, Miaphysites came to the fore in Edessa. In 489 Emperor Zeno, acting under the influence of Bishop Cyrus, closed the school of the Persians because it was regarded as a center of so-called Nestorianism. The teachers, among them the famous poet Narsai, moved to Nisibis, a reversal of the migration of Christians to Edessa more than a century before. They established a new school that evolved into the intellectual center of Nestorianism (Becker 2013; Kavvadas 2015b). Edessa remained a stronghold of the Miaphysites even though Chalcedonian bishops did not disappear completely. Often two bishops coexisted more or less peacefully. From a Theodorian perspective, however, Nisibis, which also attracted students from the Roman Empire, now eclipsed Edessa (Barḥadbeshabba of Holwan, *Schools* (*Patrologia Orientalis* 4(4)), 386, 9–10/11).

However, non-Christian religions did not disappear from Edessa completely. In 384, Theodosius granted a Pantheon of Osrhoene, which presumably stood in Edessa, a continued

right to exist although he ordered cults to stop (Cod. Theod. 16.10.8). At the end of the fifth century a festival, which Ps.-Joshua Stylites regarded as pagan, took place in the city (27, 30). Under Tiberius II (578–582), other activities perceived as pagan were observed (John of Ephesus, *Hist. eccl*. 3.3.27–29, 33; cf. Evagrius 5.18). The oppression of Jews seems to have intensified from the fourth century onward, but they remained a strong group (Segal 1970, 100–104).

The years around 500 would prove to be a time of disasters. In 494–496 a plague infested the city, then locusts ruined the harvest and caused a famine. Furthermore, the Persian war of 502–506 hit Edessa hard. Ps.-Joshua Stylites hauntingly describes the breakdown of civic life in this time. His chronicle gives us a glimpse into the inner structure of Edessa: powerful governors who cared for the poor still existed (29), but the bishop could be an important rival (39). Still, the city was strong enough to fend off the Persians in 503.

When another flood severely damaged Edessa, Emperor Justin I (518–527) offered his help and appears to have renamed the city Justinopolis (Ioh. Mal. 17.15; Evagrius 4.8). Justinian built a channel to better protect the city against the inundations of the Daiṣān River and he also built new fortifications (Procop., *Aed*. 2.7.2–16).

Throughout all these hardships, confessional struggles did not stop. In 519, imperial representatives dragged Bishop Paul out of his baptistery in order to oust him, but he somehow managed to remain in office. However, he was deposed in 522, only to be reinstalled in 526 thanks to Justinian, who possibly wanted to win over Miaphysites (Menze 2008). Jacob Baradaeus was ordained bishop of Edessa in 543/544 and remained in office until 578. He was instrumental in the establishment of a separate Miaphysite church, the Jacobites. To this end, he traveled throughout the East of the Roman Empire. Although he visited his see only infrequently, he contributed to establishing Edessa's reputation as a center of Miaphysitism.

During the sixth and early seventh centuries, Syria experienced a series of Persian invasions, but Edessa resisted the assaults for a long time. In 540, it was spared a Persian attack, either paying a ransom or, as some claimed, thanks to miracles (Procop., *Pers*. 2.12.6–34; Evagrius 4.27). In 544, Edessa managed to withstand a Persian siege. Rumor spread that the Edessenes had been helped in their defense by the holy icon of Christ. The icon supposedly brought an unquenchable fire to a tunnel the Persians had built, forcing them to withdraw (Procop., *Pers*. 2.26–27; *Goth*. 4.14.35–40; cf. Evagrius 4.27). This anecdote became famous, yet it took centuries for the icon to be used for a similar purpose. Despite relying on divine protection, the administration also saw to it that the walls were expanded to include the citadel (Procop., *Pers*. 2.27; *Aed*. 2.7.1–16). In 577, Persians again threatened Edessa and devastated its surroundings (John of Ephesus, *Hist. eccl*. 3.6.17).

Increasingly, confessional positions seem to have affected political loyalty. Along with Domitianus, the bishop of Melitene, Mauricius (582–602), was accused of killing hundreds of Miaphysites in 588/589 who resisted his attempt to introduce Chalcedonianism (*Chronicle of 1234*, 82; Michael Syrus 10.23). Under Phokas, these internal conflicts reemerged. In 609, the Persians captured Edessa and installed a Jacobite bishop (*Chronicle of 1234*, 85–89). Yet, according to Ps.-Sebeos, Edessa saw peaceful years (33Th). After Heraclius's (610–647) victory over the Persians in 629, the Romans seized Edessa again. Heraclius, who used Edessa as his base, pardoned Jews for siding with the Persians. His relations with the Christians, however, proved more difficult: the Miaphysite bishop Isaiah, who knew about Heraclius's confessional stance, refused to admit him to the Eucharist and was exiled (Agapius [*Patrologia Orientalis* 8, 466–467]; *Chronicle of 1234*, 51–52). The majority of the population now had to accept the Chalcedonian creed despite some misgivings among the local aristocrats.

Under the Caliphate

In 639, Arab troops under ʿIyāḍ seized Edessa. This, however, did not result in an immediate suppression of Christianity. Bishops of various denominations seem to have been in office at the same time. Armenian Christians became more prominent in the city and an Edessene bishop attended an Armenian council in 728. The coexistence of different Christian groups was possible (and probably in the interest of the Arab rulers who did not have to fear a united Christian opposition). Christians and Jews of the city enjoyed the privileges of so-called Peoples of the Book, but had to pay taxes they considered excessive (Kirsten 1959, 560–562; Segal 1970, 192–254; Baum 2009).

Syriac literary culture continued to flourish and even attained prominence in the Muslim empire because Syriac scholars were able to translate Greek texts that could be useful for the caliphs into Arabic. Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) was the Jacobite bishop of Edessa for four years (684–687, 708), but was deposed for his rigor. He acquired a lasting reputation as an eminent scholar and author (ter Haar Romeny 2008). The Maronite Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) was renowned for his translations of classical texts into Arabic (often via the Syriac version) and held an influential position at the Abbasid court in Baghdad. However, he left Edessa very early on and moved elsewhere.

Times were by no means quiet: two severe earthquakes (679 and 728), inundations (668 and 743), and several battles, sieges, and occupations blighted the city. Generally speaking, Edessa's strategic and economic importance declined considerably. Edessa was no longer at the frontier between East and West. Trade routes also seem to have changed. In addition, the fact that its Christian inhabitants were regarded as disloyal subjects with hidden sympathies for the Byzantine emperor would have made it seem less prudent for the caliphs to invest here. At the end of the eighth century Edessa had become a relatively small city. Yet its fame as a center of Christianity lasted for centuries and extended far beyond the Middle East.

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1 I am following the chronology of rulers as developed by Luther 1999a and 1999b; for convenience's sake, I am numbering the kings the conventional way. All dates have to be taken with reservations; see, e.g., Caillou and Brelaud 2016.

CHAPTER 30

THE HELLENISTIC FORTS ON THE EUPHRATES IN SY RIA AND JEBEL KHALID

GRAEME CLARKE

Introduction

Archaeology has revealed a remarkable series of fortified sites, dating to the Seleucid period, constructed at intervals along the middle Euphrates (which very roughly corresponds to the stretch of the river contained within modern-day Syria).[1] The construction of these sites involved, initially, not only serious planning and expenditure of resources but long-term support for manpower was required for their maintenance as well. This was no idle undertaking.

With twin capitals planned for the newly established Seleucid kingdom, one in the west at Seleukeia-in-Pieria/Antioch and one in the east at Seleukeia-on-the-Tigris, the Euphrates River became a central communication corridor between the two as well as a major defense system. Not only did the surrounding territory along the axis of the Euphrates need to be controlled and administered, but the barrier of the Euphrates itself, in spate during the summer campaigning months (being fed by the melting snows of Anatolia), became a major area for defense. Any attacking army, whether from east or west, would need to cross the river where it narrows: getting an army across, with its associated confusion and disarray along with its *impedimenta*, left it vulnerable to attack, and any traffic or movement up or down the river would need to be monitored and controlled. Accordingly, a series of forts and fortlets as well as administrative centers and watch-stations was promptly planned and established along the river, concentrated especially and initially in the north where the danger from rivals, initially from overland (such as Lysimachus) and then later from the coast (such as the Ptolemies), was the most obvious, and at desirable locations of crossing-points.

The Seleucid Forts

Just to the north of the present Syria border, 3 km from Birecik, Hacınebi Tepe (Gaborit 2012, C14 220–225) on the left bank of the Euphrates on a 3.3 ha commanding site, has produced the remnants of massive Achaemenid/or possibly early Hellenistic fortifications of field-stones and mud brick, and a partially excavated large administrative building with at least three courtyards and measuring at least 25 by 35 m in extent, only to be abandoned as such by the second century BC (there is some evidence of fire). This was perhaps initially used under the Achaemenids, to be taken over by their Macedonians conquerors, whether Antigonid or Seleucid, only to be superseded by the construction in the early third century of the major site of Apameia-on-the-Euphrates (Gaborit 2012, C07 198–208; Cohen 2013, 90–92) a few kilometers to its north on the same side of the river. This was laid out formally on an alluvial plain in an orthogonal, north–south grid pattern (insulae are 38 m × 105 m), encompassing some 65 ha with twenty-seven identical rectangular towers (ca. 17 m × 19 m) in its protective

inland rampart with indented trace along with a circular tower, 11 m in diameter, at its NE angle and at least four gateways. It, however, apparently lacked any Acropolis, agora, or monumental civic or religious buildings (though perhaps a caravanserai and a row of shops) and many of its insulae were never or only partially occupied (at this early stage, Belkis/Zeugma opposite at Kara Tepe on the right bank may have served as its defensive redoubt). But this was clearly planned and carefully executed to be a major fort protecting a major crossing point via a pontoon bridge ("Zeugma") at a curve of the river, on an established route from Antioch: the precise location of the bridge is unknown as the topography has changed since antiquity. From here there was a choice: an overland route as far as the headwaters of the Balikh and then down the Balikh to reach its confluence with the Euphrates at Nicephorion—or one might continue sailing on down the big bend of the Euphrates River, especially if transporting heavy goods. The abandonment of Apameia-on-the-Euphrates appears to be late second century BC, after the collapse of the Seleucid dynasty, followed by eventual (Parthian?) destruction, witnessed by burnt layers.

Opposite Apameia, on the right bank, was established a corresponding Hellenistic settlement, Seleukeia (Gaborit 2012, A08 19–34; Cohen 2006, 190–196), perhaps initially a mere *phrourion* on the high ground of Kara Tepe (560 m in altitude at the summit) overlooking Apameia opposite, but a stretch of wall and terracing close to the river attests to further later, Hellenistic-period, urban expansion, the site then being overlaid by subsequent major Roman and Byzantine military and civilian occupation. There can be no doubt that Apameia/Seleukeia in tandem was regarded as a crucial Seleucid defensive node on the axis of the Euphrates River.

There can also be little doubt that the next Hellenistic control point was at Jerablous/Carchemish/Europus (Gaborit 2012, A28 60–76; Cohen 2006, 169–170) on the present-day Turkish–Syrian border, 27 km south of Birecik, and some 50 km from Apameia, established on the ruins of the once massive Hittite site, although only vestiges of the Hellenistic-period occupation, notably at the south gate, north rampart, and citadel, along with abundant Hellenistic pottery, attest to its reuse as a major Seleucid fortification on this commanding site. Surface material scattered over the lower town suggests an area of eventual Hellenistic reoccupation of some 49 ha (although any chronological precision is lacking: for all we know, reoccupation may have begun as early as the Antigonids). This was a serious installation of the Seleucid defense system, with extensive river quays, a Hellenistic site regrettably little known in detail today, given its unfortunate excavation history. There may well have been a small (1 ha) corresponding fortified station on the left bank opposite at Kűçűk Kale Tepe (Gaborit 2012, C25 248–249), 5 km to the north, on a dominating escarpment of 405 m, certainly Hellenistic in date, acting in tandem with Europos.

As one continued down river there may possibly have been warning stations or administrative Hellenistic posts at Tell Amarna (8 km south of Jerablous) (Gaborit 2012, B04 83–86) and on the summit of Tell Ahmar (Gaborit 2012, D07 268–271), some 16 km further south, (perhaps a sanctuary only) but nothing decisive can be determined of the nature of their Hellenistic use (though Hellenistic-period occupation is assured), given our present state of knowledge, until we come to the major defensive and administrative site of Jebel Khalid, just to the south of the present-day Tishrin Dam, at a narrowing defile of the river, and some 50 km south of Jerablous (Cohen 2006, 178–180; Gaborit 2012, B23 129–143) along with the Hellenistic occupation of Roumeila on the opposite side of the river. A more detailed description of this important site will be provided below.

Tell as-Sweyhat (Gaborit 2012, D23 309–312), on the left bank, some 15 km to the south of Jebel Khalid, shows early Hellenistic-period occupation at the summit of the tell which had been unoccupied since its abandonment in the Bronze Age. However, it does not appear to have had

any defensive function during this phase but could possibly have served as a small, early watching-post from its 300 m height.

However, on the right bank of the river Tell al-Hajj/Eragiza (Gaborit 2012, B28 159–169), some 20 km south of Jebel Khalid, high on a similar bluff (over 300 m in altitude), shows remnants of a late Achaemenid/early Hellenistic fortification system constructed of mud brick, though it is unclear whether this was initially intended as defensive against Alexander's advance. As at Hacınebi Tepe, a possible Achaemenid defense establishment was certainly occupied during the Seleucid period, covering an area 110 m N/S × 80 m E/W of the tell, with general Hellenistic occupation attested covering an overall area 150 m N/S × 220 m E/W, only to be comprehensively destroyed at the beginning of the first century ad, after which an entirely new *castrum* was established housing a Roman cohort. This site may well have served as a watching fortlet during its Hellenistic phase. Opposite Tell al-Hajj, Tell Sheikh Hassan (Gaborit 2012, D37 330–337) has produced a large Hellenistic "palace," partially excavated, on the west slope of the tell, again comparable to that at Hacınebi Tepe, as well as a defensive rampart (mud brick on stone foundations) dated to the same Hellenistic period. It is feasible that these two sites may well have taken over original Achaemenid installations to operate together during the Seleucid period as another administrative and defensive pair for this stretch of the Euphrates Valley in the course of the Big Bend.

Generally speaking, the length of river between Tabqa and Deir-ez-Zor has been little explored for precise chronology but we do know from literary references that at the important node of the confluence of the Balikh and the Euphrates the town of Nikephorion (near present-day Raqqah) was established either by Alexander or Seleukos I (Gaborit 2015, 257; Cohen 2013, 110–112). Given its crucial location, it can be presumed to have had an important defensive function, but, unfortunately, despite intensive surveys, the site is yet to be discovered.

Further downstream, some 50 km from Raqqah in the middle Euphrates, the 7 ha site of Jazla (Gaborit 2012, E05 368–380) on the right bank of the river shows evidence of Hellenistic-period occupation, and surviving rampart walls on the east and south sides built of gypsum blocks in an alternating header and footer construction, and of a proportion characteristic of the Hellenistic period, along with remnants of rectilinear towers (at least five), point to a further Seleucid fortress—but this may well have been intended not as part of an original defensive system but rather as a response to the Parthian seizure of Mesopotamia when Greek settlements needed to acquire fortifications for their self-defense in the later second century bc. These surviving walls make the most of the defensive nature of topography in Greek fashion and are of standard Hellenistic thickness. Later (Diocletianic?) constructions overlay the remnants of these Hellenistic defenses. Similar contemporary reinforcements can be observed at Dura-Europos (Gaborit 2012, E14 417–432), and at Jebel Khalid (when the domestic houses at this time underwent a major rebuilding phase). Dura-Europos itself, further downstream, may well have initially started its Hellenistic life as a *phrourion* to monitor and control movement on this section of the river, only to be expanded similarly in the later second century when it acquired its finished defensive walls and its grid pattern of streets, but our knowledge of its Hellenistic life is largely lost as foundation debris under later Parthian-period and Roman constructions. No Hellenistic-period temple has yet been found.

Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates, North Syria

Jebel Khalid is a large limestone mesa on the right bank of the Euphrates in north Syria, covering some 50 ha of undulating land, standing at a point where the river narrows, flowing

through a defile. There, early in the third century BC, the Macedonian conquerors of the territory established a military colony to control the surrounding region as well as the river traffic. The site appears to have been uninhabited (Mottram 2013 for evidence of earlier [nomadic?] pastoralists). To protect the site, 3.4 km of walling in characteristic header and stretcher construction, and taking full strategic advantage of the topography, was promptly erected on the inland side, along with thirty bastions and towers and massive city bi-valve gates (ca. 4.6 m in total width) protected by two towers (each ca. 16 m^2, the north tower being equipped with a sally-port) (Main Gate: Connor and Clarke 2002a), and, within these walls, a separate walled Acropolis was established on high ground, enclosing 2.2 ha of land, with its own nine defensive towers, gateway, and postern. As at Apameia, there was a semi-circular tower at the rampart wall's NW re-entrant angle (14.5 m × 18 m), adjacent to a postern gate (NW Tower: Connor and Clarke 2002b). The riverine side was adequately protected by high cliffs. Jebel Khalid was clearly intended to be a major fortification within the Seleucid defense system (Connor and Clarke 1996/1997 for details of the defense system) (fig. 30.1).

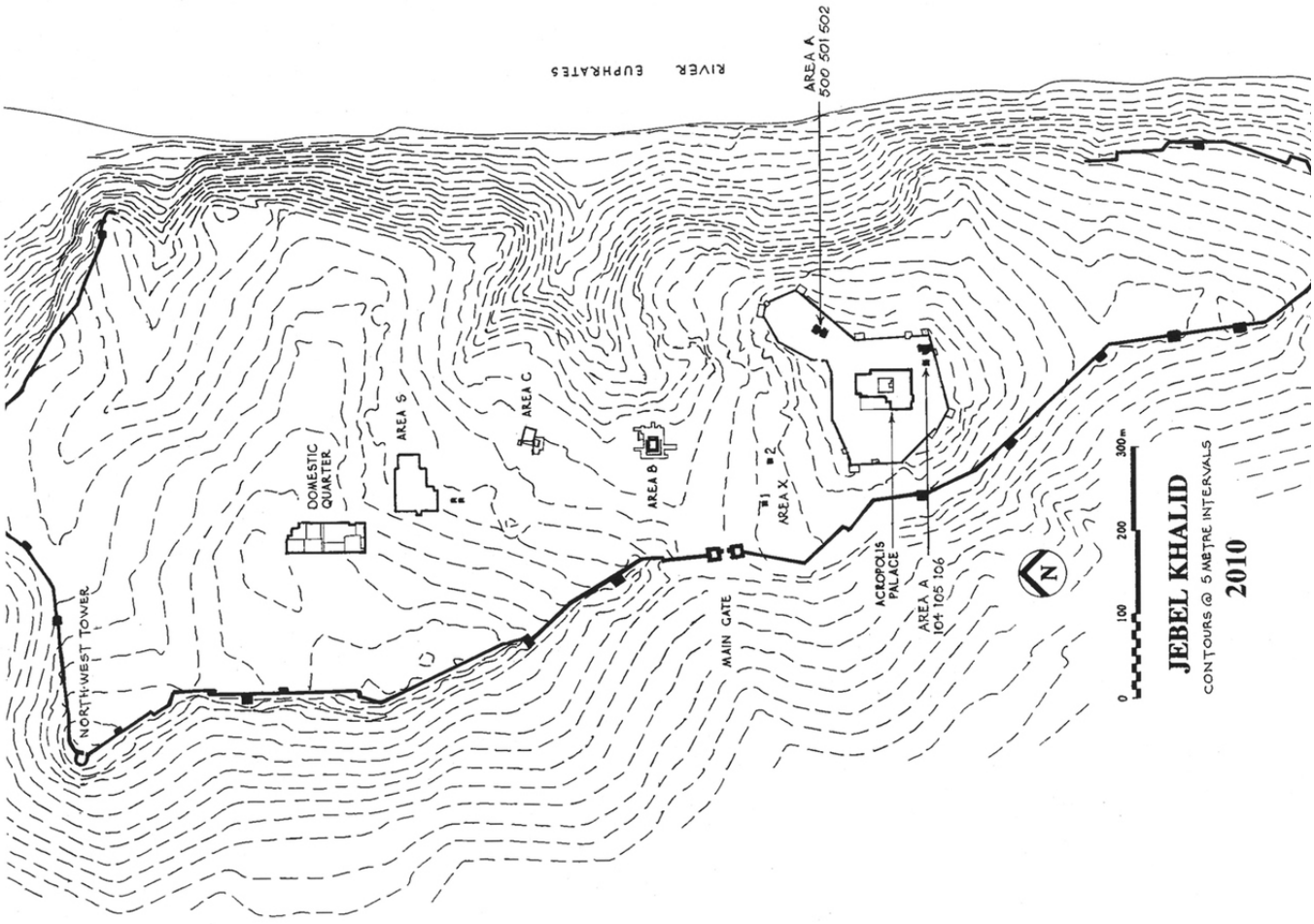

FIGURE 30.1. Contour map of Jebel Khalid, showing areas excavated up to 2010. Drawn by Dr. B. Rowney.

Quarries to provide the stonework for these defenses as well as for public and some prestige private buildings are scattered throughout the site. On the corresponding left bank opposite is the small tell of Roumeila (Gaborit 2012, D22 308–309), which sherding has shown to have been occupied during the Hellenistic period—parallel to Apameia/Seleukeia and the presumed pair Jerablous-Kűçűk Kale Tepe to the north and possibly Tell al-Hajj/Tell Sheikh Hassan to the

south, a defense strategy famously illustrated by the later fortresses of Halabiya (Gaborit 2012 E07, 383–399)/Zalabiya (Gaborit 2012 F08, 463–466) further downstream.

Inside that Acropolis fortification was adequate land for constructing an arsenal and barracks for the garrison, and, in the course of the third century bc an elaborate two-storied "Governor's Palace" was erected for the administration of the settlement. This entailed quarrying a large outcrop of limestone to form a platform as foundation for most of the building. As the ground plan shows, with its twenty-four rooms, there were two large reception halls (rooms 12 and 20) to the north and south of the internal decastyle Doric courtyard (roughly 26 m^2), each furnished with storerooms and kitchens to either side, and opening off lengthy vestibule corridors (fig. 30.2).

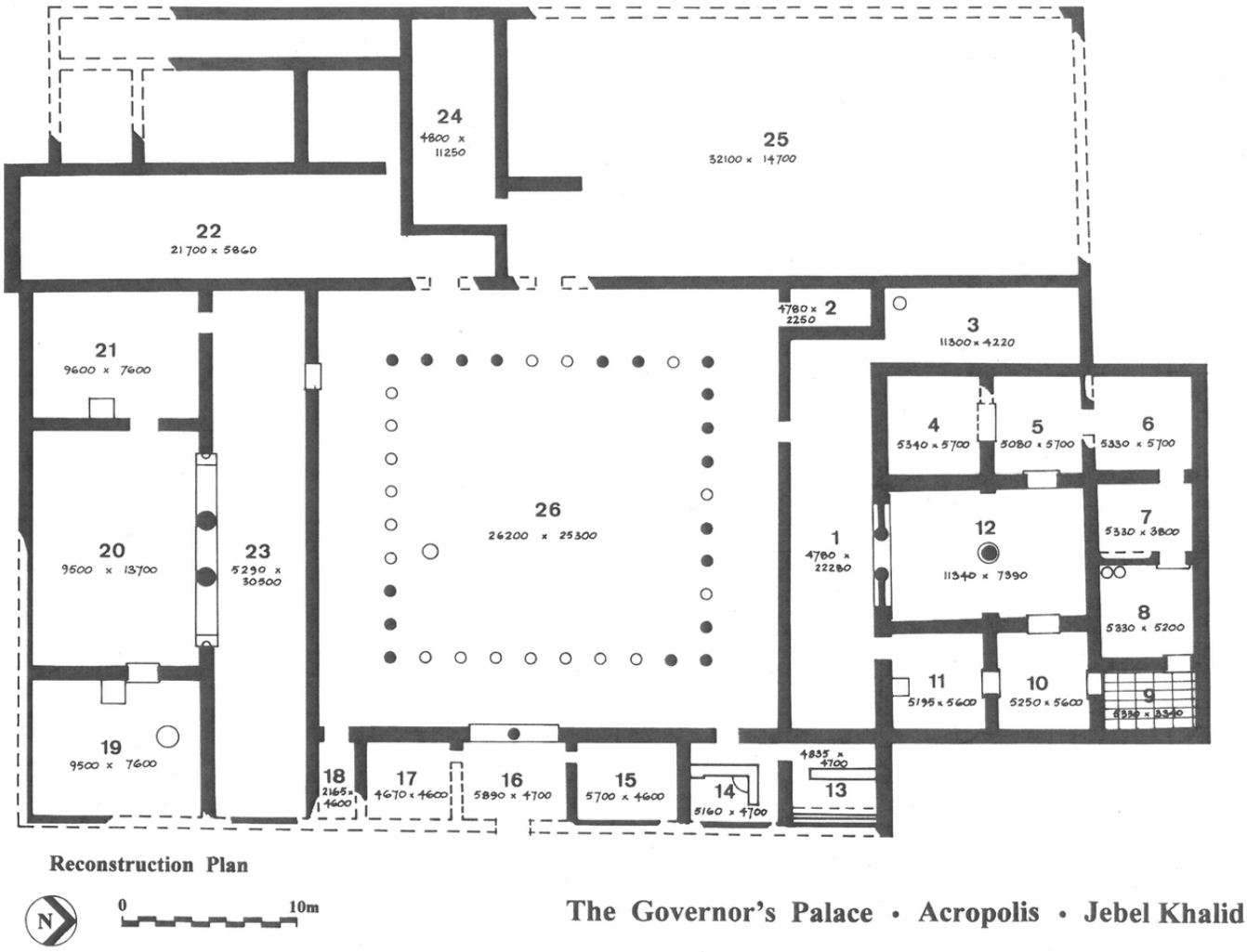

FIGURE 30.2. Plan of Acropolis Palace. Drawn by Dr. B. Rowney.

Lion-headed waterspouts helped supply water from the tiled roofing for a large bell-shaped cistern (some 6.6 m in depth) within the courtyard. Throughout, the walls were decorated in Greek-style elaborate trompe l'oeil plasterwork (Jackson 2016b). Whilst this ground plan does show some affinity to preceding Achaemenid palaces, there can be no doubt that these large halls were also put to Macedonian use, for commensality and carousing, to judge by the rich debris of eating and drinking vessels, jugs, and amphorae. The upper story, also richly decorated, and in the Ionic order, no doubt housed the governor's family and domestic staff. A

latrine and bathing complex (rooms 13 and 14), as well as courtyard garden planting, are unusual features at this date for a Greek building and owe more to eastern influences. But religious worship was carried out in Greek style in an open courtyard around a drum altar (area 25) with ample evidence of burnt animal sacrifices in the Greek manner. The hybridity is notable (Governor's Palace: Clarke 2002b).

For worship within the settlement itself a temple was also promptly erected in the third century bc, not far from the Main Gate, facing east overlooking the Euphrates River (Area B: see fig. 29.1). Again it displays self-conscious hybridity. Externally this appeared as a standard Greek hexastyle, amphiprostyle Doric temple but its internal proportions and layout were rather in the favored Mesopotamian style, with a tripartite sanctuary and being virtually square in proportion (13 m × 11 m) (fig. 30.3).

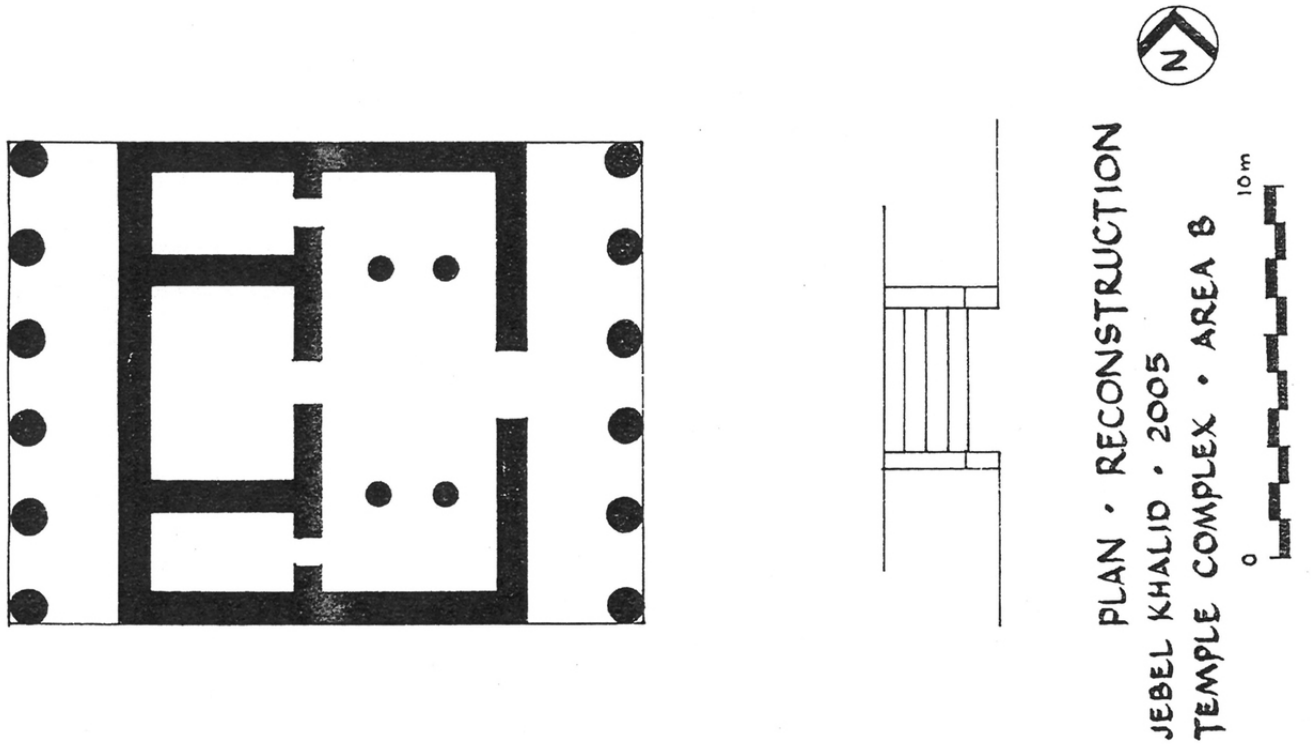

FIGURE 30.3. Plan of Jebel Khalid Temple. Drawn by Dr. B. Rowney.

An altar stood on a large open platform on the east side of the temple but there are no signs of any burnt animal sacrifices and an adjacent sump suggests rather liquid offerings were made in the local manner (as evidenced at the shrine of the Syrian goddess at nearby Membij/Hierapolis) (Temple: Clarke 2016a). The images recovered parallel this mélange, with evidence of colossal Greek-style statues carved in imported Parian marble as well as indigenous images in local limestone—at least seven different images: (Statuary: Jackson and Clarke 2016). This religious sanctuary was apparently designed to cater for a worshipping community of mixed ethnicities.

But the Greek aspirations of the settlers of Jebel Khalid are revealed by the presence of a Palaestra, built again in the third century, close to the center of the settlement and closely parallel in design and proportions with the palaestra at Delphi (Area C: see fig. 30.1). There the sons of the immigrants would be trained in the arts of Greek warfare and receive an education and formation in Greek culture and ways of living. It constitutes the earliest example of such an

institution within inland Syria and indicates a strong Greek element within the population of Jebel Khalid. It may possibly also point to an aspiration to become a *polis*, with training suitable for potential *politai* (Palaestra: Clarke 2016b).

The one housing insula excavated (35 m × 90 m) was situated on the hill north of the Acropolis, one of a number laid out on a north–south/east–west grid (see fig. 30.1). Excavation revealed seven or eight houses within the perimeter wall, and at least three phases of occupation, beginning in the third century BC. The four houses in the north of the insula were of similar size, but those in the southern section, separated from the north by a narrow alleyway, varied considerably in size and design (Housing Insula: Jackson 2014). The largest was the House of the Painted Frieze, which had two sizeable courtyards, possibly three at one phase, and a large *oikos* room at the north, decorated in the Hellenistic Masonry Style with red, black, and yellow orthostats and a figured frieze featuring Erotes driving lively goat chariots and a floral string-course (Jackson 2009, 231–253). This formal room was flanked by private rooms, accessed only from it, and this pattern was repeated more simply in some other houses, i.e., an *oikos* at the north of the courtyard, flanked by private rooms. A desire for privacy was also reflected in the entries to some of the houses via an entry room, rather than directly into the courtyard. The only house proved to have an upper storey by the existence of stairs, was North-West House 1, where fragments of columns and a stylobate were additional evidence of support for the upstairs rooms. These were not modest houses, as both their size and distance from the Acropolis imply. One might suggest that the House of the Painted Frieze was occupied by an officer of high rank, who certainly favored Greek-style decoration. But other material evidence suggests that the insula was inhabited by Syrians as well as Greeks. The tableware pottery followed Greek shapes, but the kitchen ware featured shapes that were only slightly modified from the local Iron Age forms (Pottery: Jackson and Tidmarsh 2011). The insula produced the greatest number of Persian rider figurines and Astarte plaques in the local tradition, albeit alongside Greek-style figurines (Jackson 2006; 2016c).

To the south-east of the insula was a large complex of a different character, which has not been completely excavated. This is Area S (see fig. 30.1). The discovery of a stretch of colonnaded stylobate early in the campaign had led to thoughts of a Stoa, but subsequent excavation found that, at 18 m maximum length, it was unsuitably short. This colonnaded building faced east onto a large courtyard, originally enclosed with a doorway east. A second, parallel courtyard was found adjacent to it to the north, but not communicating with it. The northern courtyard was flanked by large rooms, organized in what might be called suites, perhaps consisting of office and workroom. Neither the layout nor the material contents were domestic in nature. Could it have functioned as a caravanserai or a warehouse? Large jars dominated the pottery corpus and "personal" items were rare. The whole complex of Area S was surrounded by a perimeter wall, with entry only at the south and east. To the east was the Euphrates, accessible by a path leading down via a wadi, past a small previous excavation that had unearthed several large pithoi. It seems possible, from the fact of the river access, that Area S was associated with river traffic and that the colonnaded building was some kind of administrative building, such as a market hall (Area S: Jackson 2016a). Monitoring river traffic and safeguarding river trade was of manifold importance; river quays are visible, currently just below the surface of the headwaters of Lake Assad.

As the coinage indicates, the site was substantially abandoned by the late 70s/early 60s BC as the Seleucid regime itself collapsed (some late Hellenistic squatter occupation followed in the now abandoned and pillaged buildings) (Coinage: Nixon 2002; 2008; 2016). Only the Temple precinct continued in use as an established local sanctuary, being modified for local ritual with the erection of a remarkable series of at least twenty-three fluted columnar incense altars and a new perimeter wall, until its eventual collapse in the course of the later second or early third

century AD. Roman-period encampments followed, established over the ruined site (Jackson 2017).

There is every indication that Jebel Khalid was intended to be a key installation in securing Seleucid control of the northern Euphrates at a strategic key point in the middle of the "Big Bend," where the Euphrates describes a curve closest to the Mediterranean coast. So far as our present knowledge goes, of all the Seleucid military installations along this Syrian stretch of the Euphrates, Jebel Khalid shows the heaviest investment in monumental public buildings and spaces—Acropolis Palace and outbuildings, Temple, Palaestra, and the Commercial Area of Area S—not to mention the insula of far from modest houses.

Conclusion

Given the state of our present knowledge, it would appear that the Seleucid fortification system on the Syrian Euphrates was concentrated in northern Syria to strengthen Seleucid control of the region, where the threat was initially perceived to be strongest. But even after Corupedium (281 BC), Cilicia still remained for large periods in hostile hands, with the Ptolemies ever encroaching on Seleucid territories in the region, especially with the occupation of Ras ibn Hani and the long-term seizure of even Seleukeia-in-Pieria. Even when the focus of threat and military action shifted more to the southern regions during the third-century "Syrian Wars," maintaining the defense of the river highway was still a strategic priority. All this reveals serious strategic planning by the Seleucid court. And then in the course of the second century the emergence of an aggressive Arsacid Parthia, along with the establishment of an independent Commagene and the pro-Parthian kingdom of Osrhoene, occasioned a major geopolitical shift and increasing pressure was brought to bear on the Euphrates as a defensive border area.

But whilst this system may well have been primarily military in focus, it nevertheless had economic consequences—the influx of new settlers with superior spending power requiring labor for quarrying and building operations, stimulating the production of defense and military equipment as well as supplies of livestock and animal and agricultural products for the settlements, and encouraging regional trade along the river (for example Clarke et al. 2019). Hence the manifest phenomenon of Hellenistic settlements in the villages and tells clustering in the vicinity of the defensive installations—Gaborit, for example, counts thirteen around Apameia, sixteen around Jerablous, sixteen around Dura-Europos (Gaborit 2015, 242). Whilst Apameia is known in some detail from remarkable geophysical survey and rescue sondages before it was inundated by the construction of the Birecik dam, Jebel Khalid can today provide the best available evidence of the facilities of a major Seleucid fortification, indeed the most significant known to us, for the Hellenistic Syrian Euphrates, involving heavy expenditure of manpower and resources in its establishment and maintenance.

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1 References to Gaborit and to Cohen will provide adequate documentation and bibliography on the archaeological sites mentioned in this chapter. I thank Dr Heather Jackson for providing draft material on the houses and Area S of Jebel Khalid.

CHAPTER 31

EUROPOS-DURA (CA. 300 BC–AD 256)

PIERRE LERICHE

In the Syrian steppe from Deir ez Zor to the Iraqi frontier, one can discover, barring up the eastern horizon, the one-kilometer-long stone western rampart of the ancient city of Europos-Dura (figs 31.1–31.2). In the middle of this wonderfully preserved wall with its fourteen powerful towers appears the principal gate of the city, the monumental "Palmyra Gate," with an impressive arched passage and its walls covered with engraved Greek, Latin, and Aramaic graffiti (fig. 31.3). To the north and south, the inner city is limited by two deep west–east gullies that cut the plateau and are trimmed by bordering walls and towers. And 700 m east of the western wall, a high north–south cliff hangs 40 m over the banks of the large Euphrates River, crowned by the remains of the ancient citadel of which the eastern side fell into the river.

FIGURE 31.1. Europos-Dura. Air view in Autumn 1986.

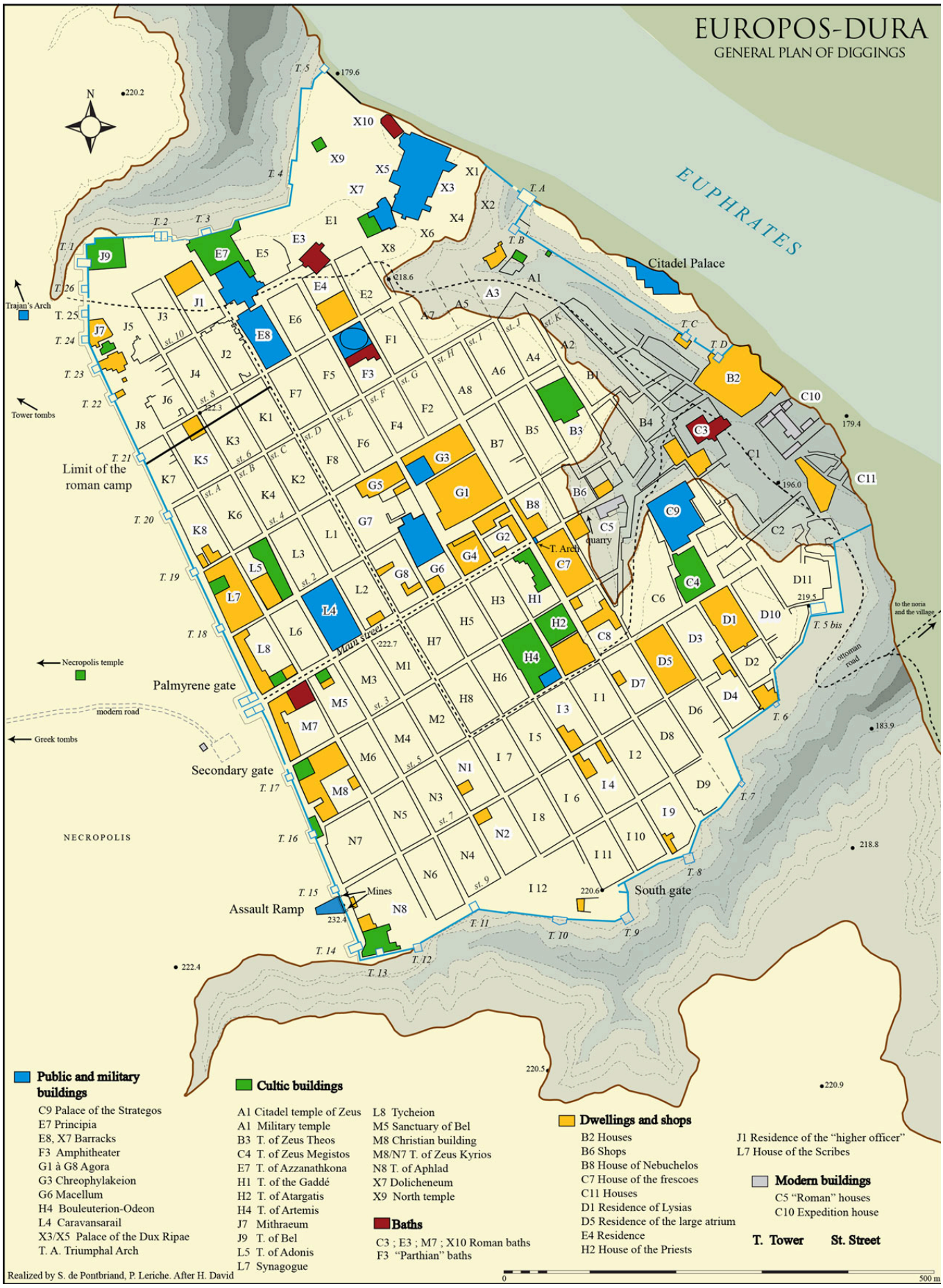
EUROPOS-DURA
GENERAL PLAN OF DIGGINGS
EUPHRATES
N
Citadel Palace
Trajan's Arch
Tower tombs
Limit of the roman camp
Necropolis temple
Palmyrene gate
modern road
Greek tombs
Secondary gate
NECROPOLIS
Assault Ramp
Mines
South gate
Main Street
quarry
T. Arch
to the noria and the village
ottoman road
T. 5 bis
Public and military buildings
C9 Palace of the Strategos
E7 Principia
E8, X7 Barracks
F3 Amphitheater
G1 à G8 Agora
G3 Chreophylakeion
G6 Macellum
H4 Bouleuterion-Odeon
L4 Caravansarail
X3/X5 Palace of the Dux Ripae
T. A. Triumphal Arch
Cultic buildings
A1 Citadel temple of Zeus
A1 Military temple
B3 T. of Zeus Theos
C4 T. of Zeus Megistos
E7 T. of Azzanathkona
H1 T. of the Gaddé
H2 T. of Atargatis
H4 T. of Artemis
J7 Mithraeum
J9 T. of Bel
L5 T. of Adonis
L7 Synagogue
L8 Tycheion
M5 Sanctuary of Bel
M8 Christian building
M8/N7 T. of Zeus Kyrios
N8 T. of Aphlad
X7 Dolicheneum
X9 North temple
Baths
C3 ; E3 ; M7 ; X10 Roman baths
F3 "Parthian" baths
Dwellings and shops
B2 Houses
B6 Shops
B8 House of Nebuchelos
C7 House of the frescoes
C11 Houses
D1 Residence of Lysias
D5 Residence of the large atrium
E4 Residence
H2 House of the Priests
J1 Residence of the "higher officer"
L7 House of the Scribes
Modern buildings
C5 "Roman" houses
C10 Expedition house
T. Tower
St. Street
Realized by S. de Pontbriand, P. Leriche. After H. David
0
500 m

FIGURE 31.2. Europos-Dura. General map of the site. MFSED.

FIGURE 31.3. Europos-Dura. View of the city wall of Europos-Dura with its central Palmyra Gate. MFSED.

Before 2011, inside the ramparts, the space was totally covered by the remains of the ancient town, typically marked by the result of the intense archaeological activity that uncovered some major Hellenistic monuments (the citadel, the stone ramparts, and the Strategeion). But it is mainly Parthian or Roman remains of numerous great or small buildings that appear around a large central square and along straight streets in a hippodamic plan. Among them run long earthen levees of rubble that bore railways for the wagons of rubble from the old diggings and some recently restored monuments appear.

Built of calcareous gypsum, mud bricks, or clay, the buildings have been damaged, even since antiquity, and the urban landscape cannot rival that of the great stone sites such as Palmyra, Bosra, or Apamea in Syria. However, the number of military works, civil or religious buildings, baths, and residences that have been excavated here is considerable and the documentation produced from them and from numerous excavated private houses is the most important among all the sites in the classical Near East.

Such a rich historical documentation gave way to fundamental publications: the site became of primary importance for our knowledge of the classical Near East, from the Hellenistic period to the Sassanian conquest, and, more generally, for the history of the ancient world.

This abundance of data is due to the wonderful state of preservation of this 50 ha ancient town brutally depopulated by the Sassanids in the middle of the third century ad after five centuries of existence. The site was then totally forgotten till the beginning of the twentieth century, but after its discovery, its remains have been explored by three successive archaeological expeditions that worked here with outstanding historical results.

Three Archaeological Expeditions

Immediately after the end of the First World War, a military expedition created at the initiative of the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres and headed by the Belgian erudite F. Cumont (1921–1923) explored during two seasons the temple of Bel with the recently discovered paintings and a temple of Artemis with sculptures and gathered some parchments and papyri.

From 1928 to 1937 an American-French expedition guided by the Russian scholar émigré at Yale University, Pr M. I. Rostovtzeff and American scholars, explored during ten long seasons, with up to three hundred workers headed by a French then an American architect, approximately a quarter of the surface of the site. Already, in 1938, Rostovtzeff summed up the most important results in a synthesis *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), and published ten volumes of *Preliminary Reports* until 1952. Then *Final Reports* were published, eleven by the members of the expedition itself (before 1967) and six *Final Reports*, based on the archives of the Yale material, until 2004.

In 1986, fifty years after the end of the Yale expedition, a French-Syrian expedition headed by P. Leriche (CNRS) and A. Al Mahmoud (DGAMS) resumed work on the site with the project to save the monuments unearthed by the previous two expeditions and to apply in the field—with a maximum of thirty workers—the methods of modern scientific archaeology in order to reexamine the ancient diggings and to analyze some unexplored parts of the city like fortifications, citadel, city plan, houses, stratigraphy, etc. A site museum has been also built inside the site. Some preliminary results have been published in *Doura-Europos Études* I to VI (1986–1997) and in *Europos-Doura: Varia* I (2012). Various studies have been published and six final publications (stone fortifications, town planning, two palaces, ceramics and a new synthesis) are in course.

Nowadays, alas, like in other Syrian sites, archaeological exploration is definitively interrupted since Europos-Dura has been totally looted and partly destroyed in 2011. All the surface is pierced by thousands of holes like moon craters made by the looters organized by ISIS. But, by chance, a good part of archaeological material and the important scientific documentation remain preserved in museums (Damascus, Yale University and France), ready to be exploited. This precious documentation concerns every period of existence of the city, but mainly, of course, the last, i.e., the Roman, period.

A Hazardous Archaeological Discovery

In the spring of 1920, a British detachment under commandment of Captain Murphy, left Deir ez Zor and retreated southward along the right bank of the Euphrates River under the pressure of Faisal's troops who, in October 1918, proclaimed himself king in Damascus, contrary to the commitments of Lawrence of Arabia. On 30 March, this detachment took refuge in the ruins of an ancient fortified city, near the village of Salhiye. The soldiers dug entrenchments along the buried western rampart of a dead city and, suddenly a big mass of earth collapsed revealing large mural paintings. These brightly colored murals, covering the western wall of a building fastened to the foot of a powerful stone tower, represented standing larger-than-life figures, dressed in long white robes, some of them wearing high pointed hats, facing the spectator, their eyes fixed on him.

As a cultured man, Captain Murphy guessed it was a major discovery. He alerted the main commander who, despite a very critical military situation (the British lost five hundred soldiers out of two thousand men in the region), called the American archaeologist J. Breasted who, at this time, was prospecting the archaeological region near Baghdad. A month later, Breasted arrived in Salhiye and, on 4 May, in only one day, photographed, drew, and studied *in extremis* the paintings, which were then covered. The next day, the British soldiers abandoned the place.

Breasted understood that these religious paintings were a unique witness of the civilization born from Alexander's conquest of the Orient. A civilization in which Byzantine art and the other religious arts of the Near East and the West took root in the first centuries of our era.

Two years later, in July 1922, at the invitation of the specialist in oriental religions in the Roman Empire, the academician Franz Cumont, Breasted came to Paris and presented his

discovery to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Enthusiastic, the Academy asked General Gouraud, high commissioner of the French Mandate in Syria, to set up an archaeological expedition led by Cumont to clear the "paintings of the chamber in Salihié." During three campaigns from 1922 to 1924, the whole "building with paintings" was excavated with the help of a military detachment and identified as a large temple. The inscriptions painted on its internal walls revealed that it was dedicated to the great god Bel in a city called "Doura Europos." And Cumont identified this ancient city with the Macedonian Eurôpos mentioned by ancient sources and which had been unsuccessfully sought for on the left bank of the Euphrates. Other monuments were also excavated during this period, including a temple of Artemis and a temple of Atargatis, some private houses, and some tombs. But in 1924, the resumption of hostilities in the region put an end to the expedition.

Cumont did not wait more than two years to present in an outstanding publication, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos*, the results of his expedition.

Four years later, these results led his academic friend, the famous Russian émigré scholar Mikhaîl Rostovtzeff to create, in his turn, a new expedition with the support of the American University of Yale (New Haven) and of the Rockefeller Foundation associated with the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. A month-long preliminary organizational expedition took place in the spring of 1928, with Rostovtzeff, Cumont, and, as director of the excavations, the architect Maurice Pillet. Then, each year, a campaign was conducted, from the beginning of October to the beginning of April, with a workforce of up to three hundred workers. Unfortunately, in 1937, work had to be—temporarily they said—interrupted for lack of money. But two years later, the outbreak of the Second World War prevented the resumption of work. The site was therefore left abandoned.

More than a quarter of the surface of the ancient town had been then explored, producing a very abundant and remarkable material. A large part of the written and figurative documentation as well as coins and small objects have been published. But, on the other hand, findings of the town itself and many public monuments are still waiting to be definitively published.

During half a century, nothing happened on the deserted site, which progressively crumbled. Finally in 1986, the Mission Franco-Syrienne d'Europos-Doura (MFSED) was created by the author of these lines with the support of French CNRS and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums and, sometimes, by private French companies (Total and Lafarge). It has been working on the site two months each year, till 2011 with the aim to carry out the preservation and presentation of the very deteriorated urban site, to resume archaeological study, and, of course, to publish the discovered but unpublished monuments and the new scientific results. In spite of its modest importance (thirty workers, staying on the site two months a year), during more than twenty seasons many monuments have been consolidated and saved from the ruin and new excavations with contemporary problematics and techniques have been opened, leading to new discoveries. In 2005, a site museum was opened in an ancient house completely rebuilt.

Unfortunately, the beginning of May 2011 saw the end of this expedition with the political troubles. Since this date, we have never been able to return to the site, which has been quickly totally looted, inside and outside its fortifications.

But, by chance, the important archaeological documentation of these three expeditions remains preserved in the United States, in France, and in Damascus, ready to be exploited. This precious archaeological material concerns every period of existence of the city, mainly, of course, the last period, i.e., the Roman period.

Thanks to these three successive expeditions, the abundance of scientific information gathered, and the numerous publications they produced, Europos-Doura, as a "Pompei of the

desert" (Rostovtzeff), became one of the best-known Near Eastern ancient cities. It is now a remarkable witness to five centuries of the classical Near Eastern civilization, a fundamental treasury for all the studies about the Hellenistic, Parthian, and Roman Orient.

A Half-Millennium History

Hellenistic Eurôpos

We know from Plutarch, Appian, and later sources (see Cohen 1978, 1) that Alexander created seventy foundations in his empire and that his Seleucid successors in Asia followed his example, giving their foundations Seleucid names or names of Greek or Macedonian cities. We know that these "foundations," which housed invalids and wounded soldiers, were, for the most part, modest strongholds (*phrouria*).

This was probably the case with our Eurôpos, probably settled at the beginning in the citadel dominating the right bank of the Euphrates. Then, a century and a half later, this post-fort was enlarged into a true city, probably in the context of strengthening the Seleucid Empire, which lost its Iranian provinces and was gradually shrinking under the blows of the Parthian Empire. The immediate object was to add new immigrants from the Hellenized Mediterranean world to the descendants of the original Macedonian settlers and, probably, to integrate part of the local Hellenized population.

It was then that the new Eurôpos received its typical Hellenistic town planning. Protected and limited by powerful walls, the urban space was divided into identical rectangular blocks organized around a vast agora and separated by streets traced out at right angles.

Today, however, the image of the city is somewhat blurred due to the collapse of the Euphrates cliff, which swept away half of the citadel and parts of the river rampart, and also by subsequent developments in urban surface use.

The walls, up to date with the contemporaneous techniques of siege warfare protected the new city. They run along the natural limits of the new town—to the south, the east, and the north—that means the natural limits of the plateau, strengthened with irregularly distributed towers. In contrast, to the west, on the plateau, the wall adopts a rectilinear layout defended by regularly spaced quadrangular towers. On this side of the city, the fortifications have been remarkably preserved by a great Roman embankment that engulfed their base as a protection against a Sassanid attack that happened in 256 and led to the abandonment of the city. Along the river, the imposing three-hundred-meter-long ashlar citadel rises with the remains of the first palace of the town at its center.

Of the four gates of the city, only two remain: the monumental western "Palmyra Gate" with a two towers square plan, and the "funnel-shaped" southern gate, just as wide as a narrow street. Unfortunately, the gate opening in the north rampart and the river gate—placed not in the extension of the main street, but to the southeast—no longer exist.

When the Parthians menaced the city, the stone enclosure, which was not finished, was completed with mud bricks.

The Europos plan is one of the most typical illustrations of so-called hippodamean urban planning, based on the principle of distributing identical blocks of one hundred by two hundred feet—or thirty-five by seventy meters—representing the area of eight houses of three hundred square meters each. These blocks are separated by orthogonal streets: five to eight meters wide, twelve for the main street. Every public and private building fits into this plan which was recorded in the archives of the notaries (*chreophylakes*) and remained the intangible reference for any subsequent urban development.

But, when the city was conquered by the Parthians, only a small part of the space enclosed between the walls had been built: in the center of the city, the project of a large agora extending over the surface of eight blocks had only been carried out in its northern part.

The Palace of the Citadel (left unfinished due to the partial collapse of the cliff) and the Palace of the *strategos* overlooking the inner road facing the citadel are the only two non-military buildings that have retained part of their Hellenistic appearance. The Strategeion was of modest dimensions—about half a block—and its design was that of a patrician house organized around a central courtyard bordered on two sides by faceted columns. It was built with mud bricks on a high base of ashlar, the *orthostats* of which were adorned with a table decoration or a domed boss. At the beginning of the second century BC, it was enlarged toward the north and the base of this new façade, which overhangs the interior depression, has been beautifully decorated with shaped cushion bosses.

Apart from the city fortifications, the citadel, the two palaces, and the city plan, the aspect of the Hellenistic Europos has for the most part largely been modified over time and has a face dating mostly from the Roman period.

Thus, of the two main Hellenistic temples of the city, one dedicated to Zeus Megistos and the other to Artemis, only some drums of Doric columns and one huge Ionic capital—reused in a wall of the private residence of the *strategos kai epistates* Lysias (cf. de Pontbriand 2012)—have been found. And, as far as the figurative arts are concerned, we unfortunately do not possess any sculpted or painted representations that would allow us to judge the art that prevailed in the city.

In the same way, we do not have any indication of the institutions of the new city and we cannot even assert whether, besides the *strategos*, there existed one or more deliberative assemblies as in the classical Greek cities.

Parthian Prosperity

At the end of the second century BC, the Parthians, coming from the regions close to the Caspian Sea, seized the Iranian satrapies of the Seleucid Empire and then Mesopotamia. Between 115 and 110 BC, Eurôpos was conquered and incorporated for nearly three centuries into the Parthian Empire (except the AD 115 to 117 period, when Trajan's troops occupied the city and erected a triumphal arch in the necropolis).

In this new framework, immigration from Macedonia or the Greek world in general stopped. To populate the space, which was much too large for the descendants of the first settlers alone, the city welcomed new inhabitants of all origins, as shown by the numerous parchments and papyri as well as the very numerous inscriptions in Greek, but also in Palmyrene, Hatrene, Safaitic, and, generally speaking, the presence of many Semitic names. Their very diversity shows us the multiplicity of groups that appear gradually at Eurôpos.

Each of these groups had its own place of worship that constituted the center and visible affirmation of the community's existence. This explains the profusion of community temples dedicated to Semitic gods in the city: three temples of Bel, temples of Aphlad-Haddad, Azzanathkona-Artemis, Atargatis—daughter of Haddad and sister-wife of Adonis—Adonis, the Gaddé, Zeus Theos-Bel, etc. and the frequent associations of many Semitic deities with Greek gods: Zeus Megistos with Arsou, Zeus Kyrios with Baal-Shamin, Artemis with Nanaia, etc.

Apparently, all these communities normally coexisted without any problem. But one can observe, especially in the inscriptions of some terraced rooms, a clear social predominance of the Macedonian element, originating from the first settlers, which constitutes the local aristocracy and still retained control of the institutions. Thus, the "Macedonians" obtained the

creation of a *bouleuterion*, an assembly of wise men under the governor of the town, a governor who bore the double Greek and Parthian title of *strategos kai epistates*.

The city then experienced a phase of unprecedented prosperity and peace that contrasted with the negative image the Romans presented of the Parthian world. The abundance of coinage from all over the Middle East shows that Europos established trade relations with cities in the Euphrates Valley and western Syria. Craft activity developed there, particularly with the presence of numerous pottery kilns, a production which clearly exceeds the needs of the population.

In the Parthian Empire, the city lost any military role. The ramparts lost their military role and were limited to police functions. The Palmyra Gate and the south gate underwent various modifications to facilitate the control of unknown people. Even some parts of the walls were partly occupied by a large number of civil or religious constructions. While strictly respecting the layout of the site in the Greek period—apart from the agora, which was overrun with houses—the new constructions occupy all the available space within the walls.

With the exception of the palatial residences, which occupy half or even the whole of a block, the houses of Europos, whether rich or modest, present very great unity of design. Closed to the outside, a house is usually only accessible through a single door opening onto a long corridor that leads at right angles to a central courtyard sometimes decorated with columns but never with a peristyle. One or two rows of rooms, often with benches, border the courtyard. The reception room—*andrôn*—is generally located to the south of the courtyard, sheltered from the sun. Houses have one storey, which often covers only part of the built area. The terraces were used for family life, especially in the warm season.

Concerning religious architecture, all the temples, in fact, conform to the same type, which seems to be part of a re-elaborated pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamian tradition. Each sanctuary is surrounded by a blind wall with a main entrance door, often unique, leading to a courtyard decorated with a colonnade and lined with small peripheral rooms, most often chapels donated and maintained by donors. The temple itself is placed at the back of the courtyard, facing the entrance, on a podium with two or three steps. It is sometimes leaning against the back wall, in which case a corridor separates the cella from the courtyard wall. Its plan is square, with a wide *pronaos* and a *naos* usually surrounded by two chapels or sacristies.

The cult image is either painted on the back wall or sculpted on a bas-relief fixed on a pedestal or in a niche covered with an *arcosolium* supported by small columns. The cult was celebrated on one or more stepped altars, facing the entrance of the temple or in a private courtyard. Sometimes a stepped room was used for ceremonies reserved for initiates.

The bas-reliefs or murals in the religious buildings of Europos—while reflecting the diversity of origin of the population—reveal a common feature called "Parthian frontality," which is typical of the figurative arts of Mesopotamia at that time.

With the exception of the sculpted in the round statue of Aphrodite in the temple of Artemis—imported from Antioch or Pergamon—and of the two high relief stelae dedicated by Hairan to the temple of the Gadde—probably by a Palmyrene artist—the sculpted works are executed by local artists or craftsmen. They generally represent one or two deities—reliefs of Arsu or Iarhibol, relief of Atargatis and Haddad—surrounded by their attributes and sometimes accompanied by the representation of the donor in the guise of a cult official, such as the reliefs of Aphlad, Zeus Kyrios-Baal Shamin, or the bas-relief of Bel in the temple on the main street (fig. 31.4).

FIGURE 31.4. Europos-Dura. Bas-relief of the god Aphlad. MFSED.

Their low relief and the often rough nature of the execution cannot be explained solely by the gypsum nature of the stone, as for the representation of the figures, which is always frontal. It is also probably local artists who executed the numerous murals in the religious buildings, which have been remarkably preserved thanks to the interior embankment of the rampart.

These paintings date from the Parthian period for the oldest ones, such as the one called "Conon's sacrifice" discovered in the temple of Bel. The art revealed here is heir to the ancient East in its flatness, verisimilitude, and hieraticism, and to Greece in its architectural decoration and iconographic references. Whatever their date, these compositions are addressed, through the frontality of all their characters, directly to the spectator. In this respect, the paintings and bas-reliefs of Europos can be considered among the most representative monuments of "Parthian art." Perhaps they could be considered, in Breasted's words, the "precursors of Byzantine art."

A Roman Stronghold in an Oriental Town

In AD 165, the city was conquered by Lucius Verus and integrated into the Roman Empire with a prominent Palmyrene influence. The Edict of Caracalla, which made every free inhabitant of the empire a Roman citizen, profoundly changed the functioning of the city: the *strategos kai epistates* lost all power and the Macedonian element of the population abandoned its pre-eminence. In the same period, a richly painted synagogue and a discreet private house, dedicated to the celebration of the Christian cult which was then persecuted, were built in the rampart street. The population of Europos-Doura was diversifying in the image of the empire in the East.

Two papyri even evoke the status of Roman colony that the city would have received around 250, in the ultimate period of its existence.

At the beginning of the Roman period, Europos welcomed Palmyrene garrisons. These contingents of various legions were housed in the town. Then, around 212, a unique event in the history of the Roman army occurred: the northern quarter of the town was requisitioned to set up a real Roman camp protected by the fortifications of the city. This camp then received the old name of Dura—evidently not to make a confusion with the name Europos of the town itself. And this name appears in several texts and graffiti and in the painting of Conon where Cumont, ignoring the specificity of the place where "Conon's sacrifice" was found, identified it as the name of the city.

This camp is strictly separated from the rest of the town by an east–west wall that cuts the *insulae* K1 to K7. The main gate of the camp is to the east, near the citadel. A number of Roman buildings were erected in this camp. In the center of the camp stands the building of the *principia*—until then called the *praetorium*—to the east of which was built the palace of the *dux ripae*—the commander of the frontier. With these buildings was associated a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus and thermal baths. The main sanctuary of the camp is the old temple of Bel which is then embellished while a Mithraeum was built near the ramparts. An amphitheatre is erected at the edge of the camp. In the town itself, the construction of a military temple, three baths, and a closed market in the agora can also be attributed to the Roman army.

The buildings, which were strictly religious, were built according to an original design that is neither in the Greek or Roman tradition, nor in that of the architecture of the preceding period.

Only the "military temple" in the form of a simple four-pillared hall preceded by a colonnade and the *aedicula* at the foot of the citadel are keeping the ancient traditions. The *dolicheneum* appears as a set of small chapels dedicated to several different deities distributed around a closed courtyard with a colonnade. The plan of the synagogue derives directly from that of the house it replaced. Alone, the Mithraeum has a plan identical to that of other temples of this type in the Mediterranean world—a vestibule with two columns, an elongated *cella* with benches and a *naos* with cultic bas-reliefs in a niche—except that it is elevated and not underground. Outside the city, tower tombs, similar to all those in the region, dot the necropolis.

Finally, the ultimate discovery in the last excavation season of the French-Syrian expedition, was a small temple built against the foot of the citadel, near the gate of the Roman camp, on the path of the troops leaving on expedition. Its trace against the vertical foot of the citadel shows clearly that it has been designed according to the western model with a double-pitched roof.

This newly found temple was dedicated to Zeus, according to the fragments of four inscriptions "ZEUS" painted in red calligraphic capital letters (de Pontbriand and Leriche 2018) (fig. 31.5).

FIGURE 31.5. Europos-Dura. Fragments of murals from the small Zeus temple discovered at the foot of the Citadel in 2011. MFSED.

It was evidently designed for a Roman religious assembly: this seems represented by the fragments of frescoes discovered lying on the ground inside, which depict a crowd of male figures making the sign of salvation, like in the painting of the tribune Terentius of the temple of Bel.

Art

In the figurative arts, sculpture occupies a reduced place; for this period only the bas-reliefs of Mithra reproduce a scheme similar to all those known in the Mediterranean area at that time. Painting, on the other hand, is very widely represented, with works of varying quality. Some of them are mediocre, such as the scenes from the Gospels of the Christian House. On the other hand, some of them are of great value, such as the figures framing the cult reliefs in the temple of Zeus Theos or in the Mithraeum, or those representing the sacrifice of the tribune Terentius in the temple of Bel. But it is above all the remarkable ensemble of the synagogue that must be mentioned here, with all its walls covered with remarkable religious scenes (which show, moreover, the independence of Euphrasian Judaism from Hierosolymitan Judaism) (fig. 31.6).

FIGURE 31.6. Europos-Dura. Part of the murals of the synagogue restored in the Damascus National Museum by the MFSED.

All these paintings continue to bear the mark of the Parthian frontality to which one must add a definite influence—at the Mithraeum and in two private houses—of Sassanid art or, in the sanctuary of Bel on the main street, a Roman influence.

The Sassanian Conquest

In 227, the Sassanians succeeded the Parthians in their struggle against the Roman Empire in the name of the restoration of the Achaemenid Empire. The walls of Europos-Doura were then reinforced with new towers, and then, against the imminence of a great Sassanid offensive, the

fortifications of the town—which was on the front line—were raised and reinforced by the creation of a powerful mud-brick glacis. Inside, in a gigantic effort, an enormous embankment is piled up against the wall, flooding all the constructions along the western wall, which has enabled them to be preserved to the present day.

In 256, the Sassanid king Shapur I attacked the city and undertook several operations, the traces of which testify both to the duration of the siege and to the fierce fighting: Sassanid and Roman huge embankments, tunnels, and countermines where several defenders perished underground, towers toppled but held in place by the embankments, an impressive assault ramp that still dominates the rampart although partially collapsed, fire on the battlefield in front of the Palmyra Gate, accumulation of war material in a temporary arsenal or on the battlefield. The dimensions of the Sassanid camp indicate the scale of the effort made since it measures nearly five times the surface of the city!

The city desperately resisted, then succumbed. The whole population was deported, a Sassanid detachment remained on the site for a few weeks. Then the site was totally deserted.

A century later, the emperor Julian crossing the Euphrates River, found only a ghost city inhabited by a gigantic lion. Shortly after, the hermit Benjamin settled in the ruins of the city where Mar Mu'ain, Christian adviser of Shapur II, came to visit him. During the Omayyad period, an Arab village was established in the citadel. Finally, in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, the Ottomans re-established the old road from Deir ez Zor to Babylon by making a breach through the western rampart.

Epilogue

By the diversity of the cultures that met and melded here, by the grandiose character of the site and of some of its constructions, by the richness that it still conserved and that is today unfortunately lost forever, Europos-Dura clearly appears as one of the most important historical places of the ancient Near East. From Alexander to Shapur, the history of the Middle East is illustrated here in a tangible way, bearing vivid witness to what was the reality of the common, juridic, political, and military life in this ancient world, well illustrated in its complexity and richness.

The discovery and excavation of this exceptionally well-preserved site has revolutionized knowledge of the history of the East and has brought a remarkable mass of information, not only because of the good preservation of the documents (Europos is practically the only site outside Egypt to have provided an abundant harvest of parchments and papyrus), but also because of the nature of the artistic, architectural, and material discoveries of very diverse types. That enlightens us about the different civilizations which met here at the contact point of the Graeco-Roman world with the Semitic and Iranian East. Not to mention, the impressive Hellenistic defensive system, the presence of monuments as exceptional as the oldest building of Christian worship, the astonishing painted synagogue, the paintings of the temple of Bel, the remarkable Roman camp, the extraordinarily preserved tragic remains of the final battle between Romans and Sassanians, and the vast necropolis surrounding the city.

The Name of the Site

Since 1922 till the beginning of the twentieth century, the site was called "Dura-Europos." This double name was given to the site by F. Cumont, as a conclusion of his first archaeological

expedition on the site. At this time, the history of the site was totally unknown and nobody knew the name of the newly found ancient city. Three reasons seem to explain this decision:

- the fact that the name "Doura" appeared, with that of "Palmyra," immediately on the paintings discovered by Captain Murphy;
- F. Cumont found the name "Eurôpos" on two parchments written by two "Europaioi," i.e. two Greek citizens of the city named "Eurôpos";
- he ignored that the Terentius painting was in the military Roman camp (exceptionally settled inside the town itself, but strictly separated from the rest of the urban space) and that the name given to this camp created in 212 was "Dura," wilfully different to the city's name "Europos" to avoid any confusion.

To explain the discrepancy between the two names, Cumont wrote (p. XVI), citing Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.8.6, that "As it is generally the case in Syria, the ancient Semitic name continued to be in use aside the new one and survived it."

The problem is that, today, we know that the original name "Europos" of the Greek city was exclusively employed for this city until the end of its existence. But, paradoxically, Rostovtzeff himself, rashly followed by modern historians, systematically gave the name "Dura" to the city and even that of "Durenes" to its inhabitants, even in the Seleucid and the Parthian periods!

Thus, it seems normal—in spite of our deep respect for Prof. Rostovtzeff—to give back to the city its Greek name "Europos," the true name of the city during the totality of its five or six centuries of existence, from its foundation, in the Hellenistic period, to its end in 256, and to place after it the name of the Roman camp which lasted less than a century inside the city (cf. Leriche 2019).

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CHAPTER 32

THE CITIES OF PERSIA

HENRY P. COLBURN

Writing in the early days of the Roman Empire, Strabo reflected on the changing fortunes of the cities of Persia in the centuries after Alexander's conquests:

> Although they [the Persians] adorned the palace at Susa more than any other, they esteemed no less highly the palaces at Persepolis and Pasargadae…. These were the palaces in the time of the empire of the Persians, but the kings of later times used others, naturally less sumptuous, since Persis had been weakened, not only by the Macedonians, but still more so by the Parthians. For although the Persians are still under the rule of a king, having a king of their own, yet they are most deficient in power and are subject to the king of the Parthians. (15.3.3; trans. H. L. Jones)

This remark offers a starting point for an examination of the former Achaemenid heartland in Persis and Elymais during the Hellenistic and Sasanian periods. ("Hellenistic" is used here as a shorthand for the periods of Seleucid, Parthian, Elymaean and Persid rule in southwestern Iran.) Certainly the royal palaces at Susa, Persepolis, and Pasargadae were abandoned or destroyed in this period, either deliberately or through repurposing by later inhabitants, and these cities were never again major powers, let alone imperial capitals. But the effects of foreign domination were not uniform. Under Seleucid rule Susa became a Greek *polis*, with all the attendant institutions, and in later periods it exhibits distinctly Parthian influence in the material culture produced there. Thanks to its fertile countryside and long-standing connections to Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Persian Gulf, Susa prospered in this period; this prosperity was also reflected in the spread of new settlements in lowland Elymais and the construction of new sanctuaries in the highlands. Persis, on the other hand, became something of a backwater, isolated from the wider Hellenistic world. At the same time, perhaps in part because of this isolation, the memory of the Achaemenids remained a potent source of charismatic authority there, especially for the Persid rulers. With the advent of the Sasanian Empire, Persis once again became an imperial heartland and saw significant development as a result. Elymais also continued to prosper, although Susa, neglected if not outright maltreated by the Sasanian kings, fell into decline as its population shifted to newly founded cities such as Gundeshapur.

Elymais

"Elymais" is the name given by Greek and Roman authors to the region of Elam in southwestern Iran, comprising both the highlands of the Zagros Mountains and the lowlands around Susa; some authors also refer to the lowland portion as "Susiana." When Alexander entered Susa in 331 BC he captured an Achaemenid treasury containing, according to Diodorus Siculus (17.66.1–2), 40,000 talents of gold and silver and 9,000 gold darics. Doubtless this served as the raw materials for the coins Alexander, and later Seleucus, minted there. He installed a garrison and confirmed Abulites, the satrap appointed by Darius III, in his position. When Alexander returned in 324, however, he executed Abulites for treason. He also performed

the famous mass wedding of his Macedonian officers to Iranian noblewomen there, where he married Darius's daughter Stateira (Kosmin 2013, 674).

It is not clear who took control of Susa after Alexander's death; in the Partition of Triparadisus in 320 bc it was allotted to Antigenes. Subsequently it was controlled by Eumenes of Cardia and then, following the Battle of Gabiene in 316, by Antigonus the One-Eyed, who appointed Seleucus satrap, but soon replaced him with Apeisas. Seleucus later retook Susa along with much of western Iran ca. 311 and it became one of the major cities of the Seleucid kingdom, although not a capital or royal residence (Martinez-Sève 2010; Canepa 2018, 58–59). Initially the city was a military base governed by a *strategos*; however, sometime during the third century it was renamed Seleucia-on-the-Eulaeus and seems to have become a Greek *polis* on this occasion, with its own citizen body and the ability to elect local officials (Cohen 2013, 194–199; Potts 2016, 357, 363). The Seleucids operated a mint at Susa (Le Rider 1965; Potts 2016, 351–353), as did their Parthian and Elymaean successors. Indeed, coins are often the best source, and sometimes the only one, for the history of Elymais in this period, the chronology of which is summarized in Table 32.1.

Table 32.1. Chronology of Elymais

Rulers	*Timespan*
Seleucids	ca. 311–170s BC
Elymaeans	ca. 170s–135 BC?
Parthians	ca. 135 BC–ca. AD 40s
Elymaeans	ca. AD 40s–before 215?
Parthians	before AD 215–218?
Sasanians	AD 218–639

Seleucid rule of Susa was threatened by the revolt of Molon, satrap of Media, who captured much of the territory of Elymais before being suppressed by Antiochus III in 222 bc (Potts 2016, 354). Antiochus III and IV both subsequently led military forays into Elymais, probably in response to weakening Seleucid control there (Dąbrowa 2004). But these efforts ultimately failed to prevent the Elymaeans from establishing an independent kingdom. A damaged Aramaic inscription from Bard-e Neshandeh, dated ca. 180–160 bc, has been read as "Kabnashkir the king" (Harmatta 1976, 289–300), and may indicate the site was under Elymaean control by then. Around the same time, the first Elymaean coins, which are clearly based on Seleucid types, appear with legends naming King Kamniskires (Rezakhani 2013, 772–774; Potts 2016, 381–387). Kamniskires minted coins at Susa ca. 145 bc; he was driven out again ca. 144/143, before another (or possibly the same) Kamniskires recaptured the city. He was defeated in turn ca. 135–133 bc by Phraates II and the Parthians, who had by now taken over Mesopotamia.

As attested by the coins struck at Susa, Susiana remained part of the Arsacid Empire until the reign of Gotarzes II, ca. ad 40–51 (Potts 2016, 389–390, 394). After this, it was evidently subject once again to Elymaean rule. The sequence and reigns of the Elymaean rulers remain subject to debate, as the evidence for them is primarily the coins they struck at Susa and Seleucia-on-the-Hedyphon (the modern Jarahi River) in eastern Elymais (Potts 2016, 396–398). Also unclear is when and to what extent Elymais was a Parthian vassal. While the struggle over Susa in the second and first centuries bc suggests that Elymais was independent at that time, the appearance of Elymaean kings with the Parthian name Orodes starting in the late first century ad raises the possibility that the Parthians installed a member of the Arsacid line on the Elymaean throne (Le Rider 1965, 428; Dąbrowa 2014). Furthermore, by the early third century

Susa may have been under direct Parthian control once again, since a satrap of Susa, Khwasak, is commemorated on a stela (fig. 32.1) excavated there dating to 14 September AD 215.

FIGURE 32.1. Stele of Khwasak, **AD** 215; excavated at Susa. Limestone: H. 90.17 cm. National Museum of Iran, Tehran, 2844. Reproduced from Ghirshman 1950, pl. 11.

The Aramaic inscription states that the stela was erected by the Parthian king Artabanus IV. The stela also depicts Khwasak receiving a ring, an ancient Mesopotamian and Iranian symbol of royal legitimacy, from Artabanus (Kawami 1987, 48–51, 164–167; Potts 2016, 398–399). If Khwasak represents a restoration of Parthian rule in Elymais, it was short lived, since shortly after 218 Ardashir, the ruler of Estakhr in neighboring Persis, defeated the "king of Ahwaz,"

perhaps a reference to Khwasak. Ardashir then seized Elymais itself, which became part of the newly formed Sasanian Empire (Potts 2016, 408–415).

The excavators of Susa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had relatively little interest in the Achaemenid and later phases of the site, thus hampering our understanding of the archaeology of Hellenistic Susa. Nevertheless, it is possible to get a general impression of the site in this period from epigraphic and archaeological remains (Martinez-Sève 2002; Boucharlat 2006, 443–448; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 695–696; Potts 2016, 355–365). First, a rich corpus of Greek inscriptions has been recovered at Susa, which provide many tantalizing glimpses at life in the city (Rougemont 2012, nos. 4–10, 13–27; Potts 2016, 356–363). For example, they give the titles of major public officials, including the *strategos*, the high priest, the treasurer, overseers, and record keepers. An inscription of late third-century bc date also refers to an association of soldiers, suggesting that the city had been settled with Macedonia veterans; another inscription dated ad 1/2 refers to "guardians of the citadel" and their landholdings, presumably the descendants of these earlier settlers. Other inscriptions attest to the presence of a stadium, gymnasium, and a public records office, which have not yet been identified archaeologically, but are suggestive of a Greek *polis*. Indeed, the renaming of the city probably accompanied its transition from military colony to *polis* (Potts 2016, 363). A later inscription (Rougemont 2012, no. 3), dated ad 21, containing the text of a letter from Artabanus II to the city, alludes to the continued presence of many aspects of the Greek *polis*, including the offices of archon and treasurer, election of public officials, and formal examination of candidates, under Parthian rule. Several inscriptions also refer to the manumission of slaves by dedicating them to the Mesopotamian goddess Nanaya, in accordance with typical Greek practice, illustrating the prevalence of her cult in Hellenistic Susa (Rougemont 2012, nos. 15, 17–18, 20, 23; Potts 2016, 364–365). Many of these inscriptions were recovered from the southern part of the Villa Royale mound, which is likely where the temple once stood. According to Pliny the Elder (*HN* 6.31), who identifies Nanaya with Diana, it was the most revered temple in the region. An inscribed paving stone dating to the first century ad contains a fragmentary hymn to Apollo dedicated by one Herodorus, son of Artemon, which suggests that this Greek god was worshipped at Susa into the Parthian period (Rougemont 2012, no. 33; Potts 2016, 360–361, 394).

Second, the archaeological evidence from Susa suggests that the city grew and prospered under Seleucid and especially Parthian rule (Martinez-Sève 2002; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 695–696; Potts 2016, 356–357, 390; Canepa 2018, 84–85). This is attested by the presence of large houses, some with inner courtyards and architectural decorations, especially on the Villa Royale mound, the lavishly furnished brick tombs in the Ville des Artisans, and the great volume of Parthian glazed pottery excavated there. The houses of this period are largely orthogonal, though they do not form a regular grid, implying piecemeal growth and renovation rather than planned expansion per se. Indeed, in this period the city expanded beyond the three major mounds. The former palaces of Darius and Artaxerxes II were also used as residential areas (Boucharlat 2006, 446). Other indicators of Susa's prosperity include the large quantities of sculpture and terracottas, as well as pottery imported from the Mediterranean. The sculpture found at Susa exhibits stylistic and iconographic affinities with both Greek and Parthian artistic traditions (Amiet 2001), doubtless reflecting the promotion of a Hellenistic visual idiom under the Seleucids and its gradual supplanting by later Parthian and Elymaean aesthetics, such as on the Khwasak stela. Among the sculpture, a nearly life-size marble head of the goddess Tyche, signed by Antiochus, son of Dryas, is noteworthy for its combination of Greek iconography and Parthian sculptural details, notably the rendering of the irises and the form of the stepped merlons on the mural crown (Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 696).

Two factors in particular contributed to Susa's prosperity in this period. The first is its fortuitous location between the major cities of Mesopotamia and ports on the Persian Gulf, which allowed it to become a major entrepôt (Le Rider 1965, 304–309). In fact, Susa even played a role in Palmyra's eastern trade, as shown by a bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription from the agora of Palmyra (Yon 2012, no. 227), dating to ad 138, that honors one Iariboles, son of Lisamsus, for the assistance he rendered to the merchants in Spasinou Charax and for sending an embassy to King Orodes of Elymais at his own expense. The inscription does not say explicitly how these two services were related, but if, as noted above, the Parthians ceased to rule Elymais directly after the first century ad, the Palmyrene merchants doing business in Characene may have needed to make formal agreements with the new vassal rulers of Elymais to in order to continue trading with Susa. This could explain the purpose of Iariboles's embassy to Orodes.

The second factor is the great fertility of the lowlands around Susa. While Strabo (*Geog*. 15.3.11) clearly exaggerates the crop yields of the region, he also says that wheat, barley, and grapes were cultivated there (though he claims erroneously that the latter was introduced by the Greeks). Diodorus (19.13.16) further notes the cultivation of rice, sesame, and dates, and Pliny (*HN* 12.39) reports that the Parthians added the leaves of the *bratus* tree (identified as *Juniperus excelsa*), which grew around Shushtar, to their drinks and that the Arabians imported its wood, which they used as incense (Potts 2016, 355, 404). Landscape surveys of Susiana and the Deh Luran Plain in northern Khuzestan suggest an increase in settlement density during the Hellenistic period (Wenke 1975–1976, 104–131; Neely 2016, 240–242, 250–258), and the Seleucids also founded the city of Seleucia-on-the-Hedyphon, whose exact location remains unknown (Cohen 2013, 192–193). This expansion in settlement was accompanied by the creation of new irrigation infrastructure, perhaps to facilitate the wet-farming of rice and fruit. For example, two Greek inscriptions from Susa, dating to 37–32 bc and ad 1/2, respectively, celebrate the work of Zamaspes, *strategos* and satrap under the Parthians, to unblock the Gondeisos River, probably the modern Diz (Rougemont 2012, nos. 11–12; Potts 2016, 392–394).

Outside of Susa, the main archaeological sites in Elymais in this period are the sanctuaries at Masjed-e Solayman, Bard-e Neshandeh, and Kal-e Chendar (see also Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume), although a fourth sanctuary, Qal-e Bardi, located between Bard-e Neshandeh and Kal-e Chendar, has been identified recently (Messina 2018). These sanctuaries demonstrate that the prosperity of Elymais extended to the highlands. Masjed-e Solayman is about 40 km east of modern Shushtar, while Bard-e Neshandeh lies another 10 km to the north-east. Both sites feature massive terraces with retaining walls made of irregular stone masonry accessible by staircases (Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 697; Potts 2016, 365–368, 395–396). At Masjed-e Solayman there is a large building in the center of the terrace, identified as a temple; a second, smaller temple stands to the north-east. Both temples are rectangular and have multiple rooms. Ghirshman (1976, 89, 99–101) interpreted the larger as a temple of Athena on the basis of a bronze plaque that may depict that goddess and because Strabo (*Geog*. 16.1.18) mentions a temple of Athena in Elymais sacked by the Parthians. He also interpreted the smaller temple as a sanctuary of Heracles on account of a fragmentary statue of Heracles wrestling the Nemean lion found there. These interpretations are not certain, but on the basis of ceramic evidence it does seem that the temples were likely founded during Seleucid rule (Potts 2016, 367), not in the Iron Age as Ghirshman originally proposed. This date is also supported by terracotta figurines excavated in both temples including riders wearing the Macedonian *kausia* (Martinez-Sève 2004, 185–191); as a result, the site has been interpreted as the location of a Seleucid garrison. Coin finds indicate that the site remained in use into the Sasanian period (Augé et al. 1979, 165–168).

Bard-e Neshandeh likewise features two terraces, as well as a fortress or palace and a village, neither of which has been explored extensively. The larger, upper terrace has a small podium—possibly an altar—with a small structure adjoining it, while the lower terrace has a temple with three separate rooms surrounding a tetrastyle courtyard. Its tripartite form, along with reliefs of male and female figures on two of the column capitals, led Ghirshman (1976, 45–46, 50) to identify the temple as a sanctuary of the divine triad of Anahita, Mithra, and Ahuramazda, as he proposed that the upper terrace was dedicated to the latter. He also dated the initial construction of the terrace to the Iron Age. Neither of Ghirshman's proposals is accepted any longer. The ceramic and numismatic finds are consistent with a foundation in the early Hellenistic period, expansion of the upper terrace under the early Elymaean rulers, and construction of the tetrastyle temple in the second century ad (Augé et al. 1979, 15–17, 38–41; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 697; Salaris 2017, 143). The identification of the gods worshipped there remains unclear, as the references to Elymaean sanctuaries in Greek, Roman, and Jewish authors are vague and inconsistent (Martinez-Sève 2014, 261–262). Moreover, the architecture of the site more closely resembles that of earlier Mesopotamian and Iranian temples than it does the Zoroastrian fire altars attested in later periods (Salaris 2017, 159–171). The meager handful of Sasanian coins excavated there (Augé et al. 1979, 184) may show that the site remained in use until the fourth century ad, though they are hardly probative.

The third sanctuary, at Kal-e Chendar in the Shami Valley northwest of modern Izeh, is best known as the site of the discovery of the famous "Shami bronze," a statue of a Parthian nobleman—possibly a ruler—in riding costume (Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 697–698; Canepa 2018, 238–239; see also Bobou, chapter 9, this volume). The remains of at least twelve other statues were also found there, including fragments of an over-life-size bronze statue of a Hellenistic ruler, reconstructed as a youthful standing nude holding a spear. The statue probably represents an early Elymaean ruler, ca. 140 bc (Lindström 2021), and utilizes Hellenistic Greek royal iconography appropriated from the Seleucids. Other bronzes from the site include fragments of statues of Heracles, Dionysus, and human figures of various sizes. Recent archaeological fieldwork has identified three monumental terraces, including one with the remains of a large building, as well several tombs (Mehr Kian and Messina 2018, 299–301), suggesting that Kal-e Chendar was an elite—if not dynastic—sanctuary and a major religious space. Certainly the impressive sculptural remains imply close connections to the Elymaean royal court at Susa. Unfortunately, it is not possible on current evidence to determine what gods were worshipped there.

In the Sasanian period Elymais, now known as Ahwaz, experienced significant population growth, as indicated by the foundation of several new cities, especially Gundeshapur and Eran-Xwarrah-Shapur. Eran-Xwarrah-Shapur, whose existence has been deduced from glyptic evidence, is identified with Ivan-e Kerkha, 17 km northwest of Susa (Gyselen and Gasche 1994; Potts 2016, 420–422). The brief excavations there revealed a rectangular plan and a monumental structure. Gundeshapur, near modern Dezful in northern Khuzestan, was founded by Shapur I, possibly on the site of Parthian fortress (Potts 2016, 415–420). It went on to become one of the major cities of the Sasanian Empire and was the location of the Academy of Gundeshapur, a center of learning created when Khosrow I (r. ad 531–579) gave refuge to Nestorian Christian intellectuals fleeing the Byzantine Empire (Shahbazi and Richter-Bernburg 2002). The site has been investigated only briefly, but it is noteworthy both for its orthogonal street plan and for its waterworks which used an inverted siphon to supply a system of tunnels (Simpson 2017, 28–30). The rectangular plans of these cities may be the result of their being built by Roman prisoners of war, deported by Shapur after his victory at Antioch in ad 256 (Potts 2016, 411–415). Certainly they contributed to population growth in the region. This growth was also facilitated by further improvements to irrigation infrastructure and to the introduction

of drop-tower gristmills that used gravity-fed jets of water to operate waterwheels (Neely 2011; 2016, 242–261). Some of this growth clearly came at the expense of Susa, now known as Shush-i er-Kar, which contracted in this period (Gyselen and Gasche 1994, 22; Potts 2016, 422–425; Canepa 2018, 132–134). In ad 339, Shapur II supposedly levelled the city with three hundred elephants (Sozom., *Hist. eccl*. 2.14), but numismatic evidence and scattered textual references indicate it continued to be inhabited until the Islamic conquest.

Persis

"Persis" is the name used by Greek and Roman writers for the Persian homeland in what is today Fars Province in Iran where the cities of Persepolis and Pasargadae are located. Alexander entered Persis late in 331 BC and, as is well known, burned Persepolis after a sojourn of four months. This marked the end of the city's political importance, and by extension that of the region as a whole, though it remained a potent symbol for generations to come. Alexander appointed Peucestas satrap of Persis, who went so far as to learn the Persian language and wear Persian clothing (Kosmin 2013, 677). He retained his position until 316, when the region was captured first by Antigonus and then by Seleucus ca. 311.

Although initially firmly under Seleucid control, at some point local rulers in Persis began to strike their own coinage. When this coinage began and what it signifies for the political history of Persis, the chronology of which is summarized in Table 32.2, is a matter of some debate. The title used by the earliest rulers in their coin legends, *frataraka*, is an Achaemenid title for a military leader or governor (Callieri 2007, 128–130; Rezakhani 2013, 775; Shayegan 2017, 415–421; Canepa 2018, 252–254). It may be that at the outset these rulers were vassals of the Seleucids. At the same time these coins also feature types that allude to the Achaemenids, including the head of the ruler wearing a Persian headdress and structures with stepped merlons akin to the crenelations on the terrace at Persepolis (fig. 32.2a). This suggests that the *frataraka* used the former imperial dynasty as the source for their own authority. The beginning of this coinage has been dated as early as ca. 295 and as late as ca. 180 bc (Rezakhani 2013, 775–777; Wiesehöfer 2013, 720–723; Gholami 2020). The later chronology is arguably a better fit to the admittedly slim historical evidence for this period. At the time of Molon's revolt in 222 bc, for example, his brother Alexander was the satrap of Persis, appointed by Antiochus III (Polyb. 5.40.7), implying direct Seleucid rule. Likewise, an inscription from Magnesia-on-the-Maeander contains the text of a letter from Antiochus indicating he was in Antioch-in-Persis (probably on the Bushehr Peninsula) in 205 bc (Rougemont 2012, no. 51). Whatever independence the rulers of Persis achieved was seemingly short lived, since by the first century bc their coins begin to imitate those of the Parthians (fig. 32.2b), probably reflecting their status as vassals. This situation seemingly persisted until the early third century ad when one of these vassals—Ardashir—successfully revolted against the Parthians and formed the Sasanian Empire. This restored Persis to an important position in the political landscape of the Near East, although Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia soon became the primary imperial capital.

Table 32.2. Chronology of Persis

Rulers	*Timespan*
Seleucids	ca. 311–2nd cen. BC
Frataraka/Persids	ca. 180 BC–ca. AD 205
Parthians	1st cen. BC–ca. AD 205?
Sasanians	ca. AD 205–639

FIGURE 32.2. a. Drahm of Vadfradad II of Persis, early second century **BC**; excavated at Qasr-e Abu Nasr. Silver; Diam. 1.60 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 36.30.299. Public domain. b. Drachm of Darev II of Persis, first century **BC**; excavated at Qasr-e Abu Nasr. Silver; Diam. 1.75 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 36.30.300. Public domain.

Although Quintus Curtius (5.6–7) and Plutarch (*Alexander* 27–28) depict it as accidental, there is little doubt that Alexander's burning of Persepolis was a deliberate act. The archaeological evidence shows that not only was the fire was set in multiple places in the city but the buildings on the terrace had been thoroughly looted beforehand (Mousavi 2012, 60–63). Diodorus (17.70–71) further describes how the Macedonians slaughtered the city's inhabitants, and sometimes even each other in their thirst for plunder. The reason Alexander put Persepolis to the torch, however, remains an open question, to which ancient and modern

authors have provided many answers, including revenge for Xerxes's invasion of Greece and providing a symbolic end to Achaemenid rule (Mousavi 2012, 63–70; Kosmin 2013, 673).

Despite its destruction at the hands of Alexander, there is evidence for continued habitation and activity at Persepolis in the Hellenistic period. Perhaps the earliest indication of continuity is the banquet organized there in 316 bc by Peucestas for Eumenes and his army. Diodorus's (19.22) description of the event, which included open-air seating with guests organized in centric circles by rank and altars to the gods and Alexander and Philip, is highly suggestive of the *šip*, a ritual banquet performed by the Achaemenid kings and other members of the royal family (Henkelman 2011, 15–18). Not only is the banquet itself a continuation of earlier practice, but Peucestas's ability to procure the necessary livestock and foodstuffs may indicate that elements of the Persepolis bureaucracy which had provisioned the *šip* under the Achaemenids remained intact and functional, despite the destruction of the city itself. The continuation of Achaemenid administrative practices is further bolstered by the inscribed milestones found at Persepolis and Pasargadae, the latter of which contains both Greek and Aramaic texts (Callieri 2007, 34–36; Rougemont 2012, nos. 64–65). These milestones indicate that the Achaemenid road system in Persis was taken over and maintained by the Seleucids.

The most significant Hellenistic archaeological remains at Persepolis are an architectural complex, known as the Frataraka Temple, 300 m northwest of the terrace (Boucharlat 2006, 452–453; Callieri 2007, 51–67, 144–145; Mousavi 2012, 74–78; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 702–703; Canepa 2018, 60). Originally interpreted as a fire temple, the north building of the complex is now understood to be a temple dedicated to Greek gods. Five marble slabs were found there, each with a Greek inscription naming a god, namely Zeus Megistos, Athena Basileia, Apollo, Artemis, and Hermes (Rougemont 2012, nos. 59–63); on epigraphic grounds they likely date to the early Hellenistic period. Additionally, the pedestal in the tetrastyle hall once thought to hold the fire altar has been recognized as a type of statue base common in the Hellenistic period in the eastern Mediterranean. The south building contained the only sculpture recovered from the complex—two weathered reliefs depicting a standing man and woman, respectively, each holding a barsom. The clothing and headgear of the male figure bears a close resemblance to the Persid rulers as depicted on their coins, which suggests these figures may be a king and queen and the south building was constructed sometime after the end of Seleucid rule in Persis.

There is also some evidence for reoccupation of the Persepolis terrace itself (Boucharlat 2006, 451, 455; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 700–702). Palace H, in the southwestern corner of the terrace, was constructed of the remnants of other buildings at the site; its remains include a podium accessible via a staircase (taken from Palace G), interior partition walls, column bases, and a courtyard encircled by a mud-brick wall. At a later period Palace G was reinhabited, as suggested by the deliberate blocking of a drain in the area. Little else of this occupation remains. The crenelated parapet on the south-western wall of the terrace was also restored, perhaps in connection with the use of crenelated structures as types on Persid coinage (Callieri 2007, 120–123). Similarly, graffiti on the palatial remains on the terrace depicting men wearing diadems and upright tiaras also clearly relate to Persid coins (Callieri 2007, 132–136). These factors point to Persepolis as the seat of the local rulers of Persis (Wiesehöfer 2013, 723–724).

Echoes of the Achaemenid kings are also discernible in the rock-cut tombs at Akhur-e Rustam, 8 km south of Persepolis. Described as a "dynastic cemetery," these tombs feature architectural façades with cavetto cornices or engaged bull-headed columns that allude to Persepolis and the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rustam (Huff 2004, 597–598). Estimates for their date range from the late fourth century bc to the early Sasanian era (Huff 2004, 598; Boucharlat 2006, 454), but they arguably make the most sense in the context of Persid rule. Other tombs

near Persepolis include the Spring Cemetery along the foot of the Kuh-e Rahmat, usually dated to the late Achaemenid and early Hellenistic periods, and Parthian-period stone cairns to the east of the terrace (Boucharlat 2006, 450–451; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 703). These tombs further indicate the presence of a modest population at or near Persepolis in the Hellenistic period.

Thus even after Alexander's destruction of Persepolis, it remained a significant site. It was most likely the satrapal capital under Peucestas and the Seleucids, as well as an important religious site, as shown by Peucestas's ritual banquet and the southern building of the Frataraka Temple. It also likely remained an administrative center as well. Its importance continued under the local Persid rulers, who rebuilt portions of the terrace and expanded the Frataraka Temple. As suggested by their coins, they relied on their connection to Persepolis for their political authority and legitimacy, and it was probably also the location of their mint. Eventually, however, the city was supplanted by Estakhr, about 5 km to the north. Although once thought to be a suburb of Persepolis, the only Achaemenid material recovered there thus far is reused spolia; the excavated remains at the site date primarily to the Sasanian and Islamic periods (Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 703–704; Callieri 2018). Since Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, and his father and grandfather all reputedly came from Estakhr, it is probable that the city was founded sometime during Persid rule.

Pasargadae, about 40 km northeast of Persepolis, also shows evidence of continued occupation and activity in the Hellenistic period. Although on his first visit to the site Alexander looted 6,000 talents of silver, according to Quintus Curtius (5.6.10; cf. Arr., *Anab.* 3.18.10), upon his return to Persis from India he evidently repaired the tomb of Cyrus (Arr., *Anab.* 6.29.10–11; Curt. 10.1.32; Boucharlat 2006, 461; Stronach 2011, 75–79). Continued use of the site is most evident at the Tall-e Takht, the large stone platform built into a hilltop in the northern part of the site. Although built as the foundations of a palace for Cyrus, the Takht became a fortified compound under Darius, with a mud-brick perimeter wall with towers and a new entrance wide enough to accommodate wheeled traffic (Stronach 1978, 146–155). Possibly this was the treasury looted by Alexander. Its continued use in the Hellenistic period is implied by finds of Seleucid coins, a Greek inscription, and the green schist lid of a Gandharan reliquary dating to the second century BC or later (Callieri 2004, 97–99; 2007, 34–35, 38–39; Boucharlat 2006, 459–460; Rougemont 2012, no. 65). The discovery of a few sealed bullae in the same room as a horde of tetradrachms of Seleucus I (Stronach 1978, 179–180) may mean that Pasargadae played an administrative role under the Seleucids. In its later phases it seems to have become a residential area (Stronach 1978, 155–159). Surface finds to the north of the Takht, where geomagnetic surveys have indicated the presence of a residential area, and to the southwest of Palace S, include post-Achaemenid ceramic sherds, further suggesting Hellenistic activity in these areas as well (Boucharlat 2006, 460 n. 6; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 706). Pasargadae was largely abandoned by the Sasanian period (Stronach 2011, 79–80).

The enduring appeal of Persepolis and of the Achaemenid past more broadly is evident at other sites in Persis. Architectural fragments which may have been taken from Persepolis were found at Qal'a-ye Now in the western Marv Dasht Plain near the former Elamite town of Anshan, where they were used to construct a building. This building may have been a residence for the Persid rulers, since according to al-Tabari, the rulers of Fars before the Sasanians lived at al-Bayda', identified with the modern of village of Bayza' near Malyan (Callieri 2007, 43, 94–95, 137–138; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 700). Certainly it is in keeping with their ideology to use spolia from Persepolis in the construction of a palace. A colossal limestone head of a man wearing a tall, pointed hat similar to the crowns worn by several Parthian and Persid rulers on their coins was also found there (Kawami 1987, 138–139, 222).

On stylistic grounds the head likely dates to the late Parthian period and seems to have been part of a building as well.

Other sites in Persis also exhibit the continuing influence of Achaemenid architecture. At Tomb-e Bot in Mohr County in southern Fars, for example, a surface survey identified architectural fragments imitating Achaemenid forms, including column capitals with volutes and janiform bull protomes, made of local limestone (Callieri 2007, 138–141; Callieri and Askari Cha verdi 2013, 708; Askari Chaverdi 2017). A male bust was also found there; it is very similar to the one from Qal'a-ye Now, suggesting a roughly contemporary date for the site. The function of the building to which these elements belonged is unknown, but the columns are suggestive of a monumental scale. Also, the rock-cut tomb at Da o Dokhtar (fig. 32.3) in the northwestern Mamasani region of Fars is clearly modeled on the Achaemenid royal tombs near Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rustam (Callieri 2007, 97–98; 142–143). Like the royal tombs, it features an architectural façade with four engaged columns, which, unlike on the royal tombs, support a flat roof with stepped crenelations, a common feature at Persepolis. Yet the columns, with their simplified Ionic volute capitals, make the tomb a hybrid of Achaemenid and Greek architectural traditions, no doubt reflecting the complex cultural environment of Persis in the early Hellenistic period.

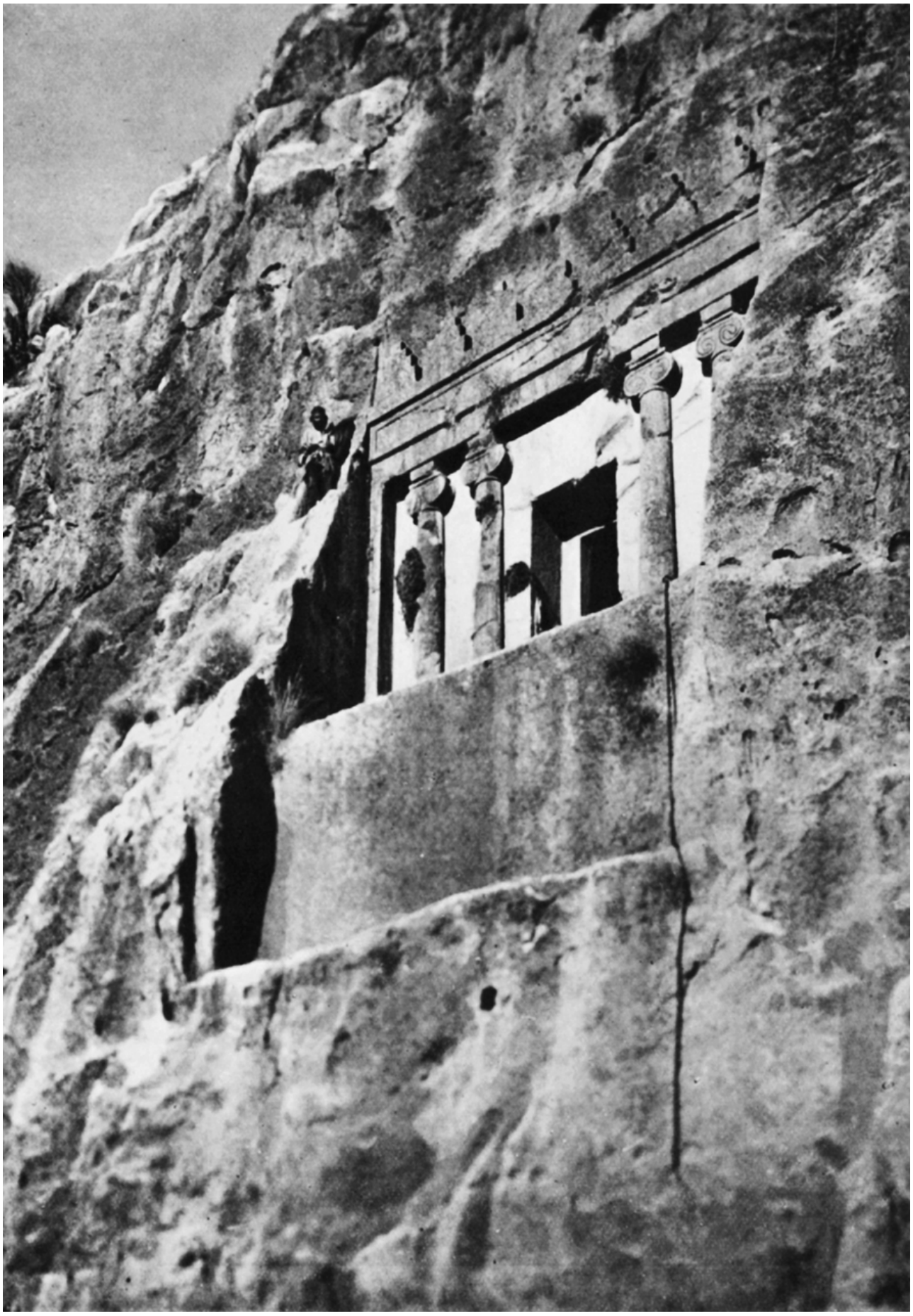

FIGURE 32.3. Da o Dokhtar rock-cut tomb, third–second centuries **BC**; near Kopon, Fars Province. Reproduced from Stein 1940, fig. 14.

Indeed, despite the relatively brief period of direct Seleucid rule in Persis, elements of Greek culture are evident there as well. The Fratraka Temple at Persepolis is one example of this, as is the small marble head of a Greek goddess, probably Aphrodite, discovered by Aurel Stein at Tal-e Zahak near Fasa in eastern Fars (Callieri 2007, 77, 104–105; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2 013, 707). The introduction of these Greek elements is likely due, at least in part, to the arrival of Seleucid colonists. The Seleucids founded at least one colony in Persis, Antioch-in-Persis, attested in an inscription from Magnesia-on-the-Maeander dating to 205 bc acknowledging Antioch's decree recognizing Magnesia's festival of Artemis Leucophryene (Cohen 2013, 185–187; Callieri 2020, 54), though it is also possible that a different Antioch is meant (Rougemont 2016). The decree states that the city was named for Antiochus I, at whose request additional colonists were sent from Magnesia to Antioch. It also indicates that the city had many features of a Greek *polis*, such as a *boule*, *ekklesia*, and public officials such as *prytaneis* and *tamiai*. Most scholars locate this city on the Bushehr Peninsula, perhaps at Bushehr itself, though it may also be further inland near Borazjan. A small marble statue of Marsyas was discovered near Borazjan in the remains of a mud-brick building might suggest the latter location for Antioch-in-Persis, since Marsyas was associated with the Maeander River Valley. On technical grounds, however, the statue probably dates to the first through third centuries ad (Callieri 200 7, 105–108; Callieri and Askari Chaverdi 2013, 709), in which case Magnesia and Antioch must have maintained their close connections for centuries. At any rate, the statue certainly demonstrates an enduring interest in Greek myth long after the end of Seleucid rule. A survey of the region around Borazjan (Carter et al. 2006, 94–97), although unable to distinguish between Achaemenid and Parthian sites, shows a general increase in the number of sites from the Middle and Neo-Elamite periods to the Achaemenid and Parthian to the Sasanian period. These results are consistent with the foundation of a city at Bushehr or near Borazjan, since either location would require expansion of agricultural activity to support it.

The extent to which the political marginalization of Persis in the Hellenistic period affected the broader region is difficult to determine, in large part because of a general lack of landscape survey data and limited excavations of relevant sites. Diodorus Siculus describes Persis as:

> Blessed with a very healthful climate and full of the fruits appropriate to the season. For there were glens heavily overgrown and shady, cultivated trees of various kinds in parks, also natural converging glades full of trees of every sort and streams of water, so that travelers lingered with delight in places pleasantly inviting repose. Also there was an abundance of cattle of every kind … and in density of population, too, this country far surpassed the other satrapies. (19.21.2–3; trans. C. H. Oldfather)

Although not a precise description by any means, elements of it are borne out by other sources. For examples, the tablets in the Persepolis Fortification Archive allude to the cultivation of quinces, mulberries, apples, plums, pears, olives, and possibly figs and pistachios during the Achaemenid period (Henkelman 2021). Many of these fruits likely continued to be cultivated, even if overall tree cultivation declined after the Achaemenid Empire, as detectable in pollen cores from Lake Maharlou (Djamali et al. 2010). Faunal remains from Pasargadae indicate the breading of cattle, as well as sheep and goats (Askari Chaverdi and Callieri 2010, 24). Some sense of settlement density may be obtained from the list of nearly thirty Persian towns and villages given Ptolemy's *Geography*. Based on coordinates given by Ptolemy, Callieri (2020, 55–60) has plotted these towns on a grid oriented to the Persian Gulf coast, resulting in a distribution which he argues is roughly aligned with the narrow valleys of Fars where one would

expect to find agricultural settlements relying on qanat irrigation. This ingenious argument must await confirmation by field survey and excavation, but it nevertheless offers a reasonable impression of the character of the landscape of Persis.

There is significant evidence for imperial investment in Persis during the Sasanian period, including the construction of new cities and towns, roads and bridges, numerous rock reliefs (see Chen, chapter 10, this volume), and irrigation infrastructure. Although Ctesiphon became the primary capital of the empire, both Ardashir I and Shapur I founded cities and built palaces in Persis. Ardashir established Ardashir-Xwarrah at Firuzabad on reclaimed land. The city was built on a circular plan 1.85 km in diameter with a tower and fire temple at its center (Huff 2014; Canepa 2018, 126–128). Ardashir also built two palaces at Firuzabad: Qal'a-ye Dokhtar, a fortified hilltop citadel, and a second, larger palace in the plain featuring monumental iwans and high domes on squinches (Canepa 2018, 255–257, 325–327). Ardashir's son and successor Shapur established Bishapur in western Persis on a rectangular plan, possibly due to the employment of Roman prisoners from Shapur's western campaigns in its construction (Simpson 2017, 28; Canepa 2018, 128–132). Romans may also have contributed to the production of the splendid mosaics there, though their style and content are very much in keeping with Sasanian art and should be considered such.

A number of smaller yet prosperous towns have been excavated as well, such as Qasr-e Abu Nasr on the outskirts of Shiraz and Tol-e Qaleh Seyfabad near Kazerun. Tol-e Qaleh Seyfabad seems to have been a center of intensive date palm cultivation, as numerous dates were recovered there, including some in storage vessels (Ghasemi et al. 2020, 284–286). It was probably a centralized processing facility operated by the imperial bureaucracy, as indicated by the sizable archive of sealed bullae, including impressions of seals from multiple levels of the provincial administration, found at the site (Ghasemi et al. 2020, 279–283). The faunal remains also show that sheep, goats, and cattle continued to be the main livestock exploited in the region (Ghasemi et al. 2020, 288–290). Finally, at least twenty-four chahartaqs—four-arched structures housing fire altars—have been identified in Fars (Vanden Berghe 1984, 208–215), suggesting that by this period Zoroastrianism had become widespread, although a Nestorian church has also been tentatively identified at Qasr-e Abu Nasr as well (Whitcomb 1985, 43–47).

As for Persepolis, by the Sasanian period it was no longer inhabited. Rather, it had become a venerable ruin, whose name was lost to time (the Sasanians called it *Sad-Sotun* or "Hundred Columns") but whose power and charisma were undiminished. Its continuing appeal is perhaps best attested by a Middle Persian inscription on a doorjamb of the Palace of Darius recording a visit to the site in ad 311 by Shapur II:

> Then, he had lunch in this building. With him were Bahram, son of Nahv Hormuzd, the Sistan councillor, Narseh the Magus, of the Varāz family, Ven, son of Rev Mehran, Satrap of Zarang, Narseh the scribe, and other Persians and nobles from Sistan and Zarang, princes and messengers from every quarter. He organized a great feast, and ordered rites performed, workmen were ordered to raise a pillar, and he offered blessings to his father and ancestors. Then he offered blessings to Shapur the King of Kings, to His own soul, and also to the one who had built this structure. May God remember them. (trans. Mousavi 2012, 81–82; see also Shayegan 2017, 437–438)

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CHAPTER 33

PARTHIAN SITES IN IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

LEONARDO GREGORATTI

Introduction

Chasing the defeated Seleucid armies in the first half of the second century BC the mounted units of the Parthians managed to rapidly gain control over all the eastern satrapies of the once powerful Greek empire. Only the Euphrates River stopped the advance of their armies, thus becoming the westernmost border of an empire that extended from India to Mesopotamia and from the Persian Gulf in the south, to the steppes of central Asia in the north; the empire of the Arsacids.

Along with the westward shift of the state's center of mass, also the official royal residence of the Parthian great kings also gradually moved from their original seat in Parthia proper, on the present border between Iran and Turkmenistan, towards central Mesopotamia (fig. 33.1).

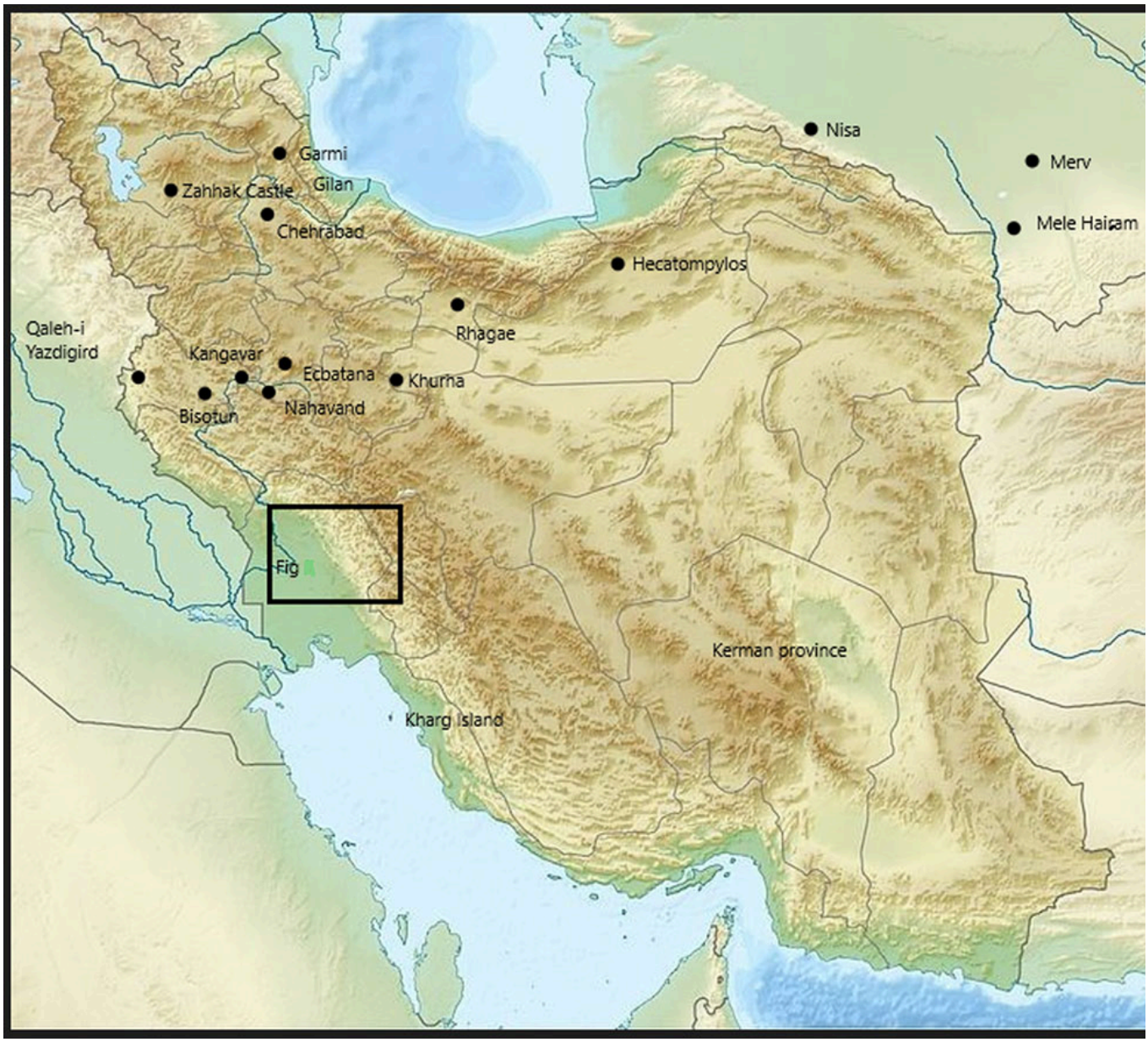

FIGURE 33.1. Map of Arsacid Iran and central Asia. Map by Leonardo Gregoratti.

Nisa: The First Capital

The most ancient and well-known Parthian royal capital is Nisa (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 12), 16 km to the west of Ashgabat, Turkmenistan (Invernizzi and Lippolis 2007; Lippolis 2023). The site consists of two separated complexes: the New Nisa, the fortified city, and Old Nisa, the citadel. The latter has been extensively excavated in recent years revealing a series of structures of enormous interest. These constitute the earliest example of Parthian architecture and decorative art and are extremely relevant because explicitly connected with an Arsacid royal residence. The citadel was named Mithradatkert (Mtrdtkrt, "fortress of Mithradates") after King Mithridates I (171–139/138 BC), the conqueror of western Asia and probable founder of the city (Pilipko 2008). The walled area is roughly triangular in form and includes several detached complexes.

The central citadel complex consists of a series of monumental buildings arranged around a large open area (fig. 33.2).

FIGURE 33.2. Old Nisa, the central main complex: (1) "Red" Building, (2) Round Temple, (3) Tower Building, (4) Square Hall, (5) "Palace" (C. Lippolis).

The Tower-Building is a square building of massive brickwork surrounded by corridors with a colonnaded portico on its northern façade. Many fragments of wall paintings have been found

in the debris of the surrounding ruins and belonged to the decoration of the upper floors. The subject of the paintings seems to have been a battle between horsemen in Iranian dress.

The Round Hall is a unique square building, which contains a large circular hall 17 m in diameter within square-shaped perimeter walls, constructed independently. The two structures are separated and the corners filled in. Fragments of monumental clay statues two meters high have been found here. Most of these fragments belong to statues draped in purely Greek style, although some pieces display typical Iranian garments. The inclination of the inner walls suggests that in ancient times the hall was covered by a mud-brick elliptical dome. This remarkable architectural element that parallels contemporary central Asiatic structures (Invernizzi 2016), along with the possible identification of the fragments of one of the bearded male statues with what remains of a portrait of King Mithridates I, suggests that the hall was used for ceremonial or cultural purposes. It was probably a sort of mausoleum built to honor Mithridates I and the Arsacids who preceded him (Invernizzi 2001a; 2009).

To the north of the Round Hall is the so-called Red Building, a quadrangular system of porticoes lying around a square central court with four wooden columns. It was embellished with a sort of frieze and a polychrome plaster decoration. Judging from the traces of elaborate decoration it seems that this building also had a relevant function in connection with the previous and adjacent one. Other important structures belonging to the so-called central complex are the Red Building and Square Hall. In the latter, the remaining parts of monumental clay statues were stored, among them the heads and torsos of male figures. The appearance of these works is clearly Hellenistic in technique and style.

The richest building as concerns archaeological findings is the so-called Square House in the northern complex of the citadel, a large building that consists of a series of long quadrangular rooms supported by a central row of wooden columns surrounding a large inner courtyard on all four sides. A splendid collection of forty ivory rhyta decorated with scenes from Greek mythology along with several metal figures depicting classical deities and characters were found here. The decoration of the rytha is remarkable: the terminal figures at the bottom of the horns represent mythological beings, human and animal. Their iconography is a blend of Greek and Iranian elements. The winged horned lion-gryphon is one of the most common creatures, but bulls and centaurs also appear along with female hydrophora figures. The still preserved traces of color reveal the rich polychromic nature of the decorations. The ivory figures on the friezes represent the twelve gods of Olympus in various scenes or groups of literary women. In these pieces, Greek iconography and style meet local central Asian execution. The vessels were certainly intended for ritual use in banquets and ceremonies, which took place in the building or in the Old Nisa complex.

According to Invernizzi (2000; 2001b) the complex was originally a banqueting area that later, probably in the first century ad, became a storage space for precious goods: furnishings, disused decorative objects, weapons, ceramics, and coins. Once the rooms were full, they were walled in, and new storage spaces were created in the area formerly occupied by the porticoes. Groups of storehouses were also later built around the old building of the Square House. In some of these elongated rooms a relevant number of ostraka were found. These epigraphical documents made it possible to shed light on the economy and administrative life of the regal foundation and, in particular, on the farms, vineyards, and lesser settlements that depended on Nisa (second–first centuries bc). It is thanks to these epigraphical texts that the name of the Old Nisa complex, Mithradātkert, the fortress of Mithridates, is known (Diakonoff, Livshits, and MacKenzie 1976–2001).

At Nisa the material culture, architectural structures, and decorations reveal an interesting use of both classical and Asiatic elements in the earliest phases of the Parthian Empire. Despite what the name suggests, archaeologists think that the main purpose of the whole site was not

a military one. Buildings such as the Tower-Building and Round Hall clearly had a sacral function. In general, all the buildings within the walls of the citadel may have served as monumental memorials for the cult of the royal ancestors or as service structures for the performance of ceremonies connected with that cult. In fact, the site ceased to be in use after the fall of the Arsacid dynasty and thus the end of its sacral function: there is no trace of activity in the Sasanian period (Invernizzi 2016).

Another Arsacid monumental complex was situated at Mansur depe, not far from Nisa. It consists of a number of buildings situated along the sides of a large courtyard and probably had a religious function. Its main features include a temple with several rooms grouped in quarters that open towards a courtyard with a large iwan surrounded by corridors on three sides (Koshelenko, Lašpin, and Novikov 2000).

Merv and the East

Merv, nowadays Mary in Turkmenistan was a city founded by Alexander with the name of Alexandria Margiana at an oasis in the Karakum Desert (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 14). During the reign of Mithridates II (123–87 BC) the city was annexed to the Parthian Empire and developed as an important station on the Silk Road between China and the West. There is a debate about which structures of the walled site can be dated without doubt to the Arsacid period. It seems that only two buildings can be reliably dated to Arsacid rule even though the main older fortifications and bastions were surely used and restored by the Parthians: the so-called "House of Artisans" in the center of the Gyaur-kala fortified complex and the fortress of Göbekli-depe (Gaibov and Nikitin 2020). The complex was linked to a series of fortresses guarding the main roads. Margiana, probably the Mulu of the Chinese annals, was "the place to which the Roman prisoners taken in the disaster of Crassus were brought" (Plin., *HN* 6.47: Greg oratti 2023, 523-527).

South of Merv, by the Serakhs Oasis, at Mele Hairam (Kaim 2004) a fire temple used during the Parthian and Sassanid periods (third century bc –seventh century ad) has been individuated and excavated. A small courtyard with a well located in the center, preceded the largest chamber of the temple where worshippers used to gather to participate in the fire cult ceremonies after having washed themselves in water drawn from the temple well. In the sanctuary objects like bronze necklaces, an alabaster figurine, and ivory plaques with female dancers and men in Parthian dress have been found.

Besides Nisa another Arsacid capital city was Hecatompylos, in Khorasan. Appian (*Syr.* 57) reports that Hecatompylos was founded by Seleucus I (312–281 bc). It has been identified as the ruins of Shahr-i Qumis, 32 km to the west of Damgan (Hansman 1968; Chaumont 1973, 219; Hansman and Stronach 1974). The site includes several mounds. In the area between them some architectural remains have been identified, belonging to a palace building and a fort. Tombs, along with ceramics, seals, and epigraphic documents dated to the first century bc have also been found. The site covers a vast area, most of which remain unexplored: only a few of the mounds have been investigated. Mound VI, a structure with several towers and a courtyard must have been some kind of fortress. It has been compared to similar fortifications from central Asia from the first centuries bc and ad. The so-called Square Building may have belonged to the Parthian royal palace.

The Parthian rulers lived in Hecatompylos during the autumn, but liked to spend the spring in Rhagae, south of modern Tehran. The city of Rhagae was refounded by Seleucus and in the Parthian period called *Arsacia (*Str., *Geog*. 11.13.6; Chaumont 1973, 204–205). According to

Isidore of Charax, it was the strongest city in Media (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 7). Important mud-brick structures and possibly a temple close to the water source are dated to the Arsacid period by coin findings of Kings Mithridates I and Pacorus II (ad 77–110; Schmidt 1935, 56). This complex was composed of a central court surrounded by rooms. Close by more than five hundred bronze coins have been found, part of treasure dating from Mithradates II to Vonones I (ad 8–12). Glazed greenish blue sherds and light grey, "clinky ware," typical indicators of Arsacid occupation (Haerinck 1983, 196–200), have been found in these premises as well as in the early phases of the site's five-towered rampart and in the complex of the *šahrestān* (Rante 2008, 192–194). Both these structures revealed an initial Parthian construction. The citadel was also defended by a strong wall, probably constructed during the Parthian period.

Arsacid Media

Moving west towards Mesopotamia another royal residence and seat of the local kings of Media, lies on the Silk Road: Ecbatana, modern-day Hamadan in western Iran (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 6; Str., *Geog*. 11.13.1, 16.1.16; Curt. 5.8.1; Tac., *Ann*. 15.31). The city, an Achaemenid capital, was conquered after 149/148 bc, the Greek inscription on the nearby Herackles sculpture at Bisotun indicates the presence of a Seleucid satrap still in those years. It was one of the most important metropolises of the Parthian Empire, second only to Seleucia on the Tigris. Along with the Mesopotamian city, it had one of the only two Arsacid mints to survive until late Parthian period, the one in charge of producing Arsacid dracms. The Arsacid summer residence city had a regular plan. Parthian buildings in the city included the citadel on Mosalla Hill in the northern part of the site along with private houses and other structures, whose large walls suggest a military function (Azarnoush 1975; Boucharlat 1998; Sarraf 2003). In the southern sector a Parthian cemetery has been discovered where the famous statue of the *Lion of Ectabana* was found.

South of Ecbatana in the city of Nahavand archaeological surveys and excavations brought to light gold vessels, figurines representing Greek gods, Ionic columns, Parthian clay coffins, Parthian coins, and samples of clinky ware. The archaeologists are now inclined to identify the site as the city of Laodicea, a Greek foundation and an important Parthian town (second century bc –first/second century ad; Rahbar et al. 2014).

West of Ecbatana, on the road to Mesopotamia, similar findings have been brought to light at Kangavar. The investigation revealed a quadrilateral platform built on an early Parthian cemetery (third century bc –first century ad). The town has thus been identified as the *Concobar* of Isidorus (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 6; Azarnoush 1981) where an important temple of the goddess Anahita was situated.

Westwards towards the Diyala River and Mesopotamia, before reaching Kermanshah, at Bisotun, close to the famous Darius relief, a large Parthian settlement has been investigated, probably the Bagistana of Isidoros (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations* 6; Callieri and Askari-Chaverdi 2013, 694). The area close to this ancient city is rich in evidence from the Parthian period. Several rock carvings have been incised by the Arsacids on mountains around Bisotun, close to the more famous Achaemenid one. The relief of Mithridates II was irremediably damaged in the seventeenth century by a Safavid monumental inscription. It depicted four satraps in a line before the king, all the figures were shown in profile below an inscription in Greek (*OGIS* I, 431; Vanden Berghe 1983, 45, 118–120). The relief of Gotarzes II (ad 41–51), which shows horsemen in combat and a Nike hovering above them, probably celebrated a

military victory (Kawami 1987, 37–43, 157–159; Hackl, Jacobs, and Weber 2010 477–478). The so-called Parthian stone or *Balash Stone* represents a certain Valgash (Vologases), king of kings son of Valgash king of kings, in traditional Parthian clothing standing by what looks like a fire altar, placing something, perhaps incense, on it with his right hand while holding a bowl in his left hand (second–third century ad; Mathiesen 1992, 175; Callieri and Askari-Chaverdi 2013, 693; Kawami 2013, 754–755).

A third relief has been found at Sarpol-i Zohāb (Gropp 1968, 315–319; Kleiss 1975, 123–132; Vanden Berghe 1983, 45; Kawami 1987, 45–48, 162–164; Kawami 2013, 755–756), further west. The scene depicted is clearly an investiture. A standing figure, a lower dignitary or an officer is portrayed receiving a diadem from a mounted sovereign. An inscription indicates that the monarch is Gotarze, great king, son of *Gēw*, that is to say Gotarzes II.

Close to the rock relief and to the main road to the west, a 40 ha stronghold lies at Qaleh-i Yazdigird (Keall 1977; 1982; 1994, 256–263). Within its defensive walls, there is a palace, that was excavated by E. J. Keall in 1975. Dated initially to the Sasanian period the complex was revealed to be an example of a Parthian residence belonging to a local high-ranking dignitary (second–third century ad). The complex is characterized by extraordinarily rich decorations. More than three hundred stucco panels covered the walls along with capitals embellished with figurative motifs (Kaim 2016). Hellenistic iconographic elements like Dionysios are present along with mythical creatures, female dancers, and men in typical Parthian costume.

Perhaps the same function of residence of a local lord can be also attributed to the complex of Zahhak Castle in Iranian Azerbaijan (first–second century ad; Kleiss 1973). There, in a site inhabited many centuries before the Arsacids, excavators brought to light a series of high-quality bas-reliefs depicting animals and soldiers in Parthian costume, now preserved in the Tabriz Museum.

Another example of a Parthian residential complex is situated at Khurha, south of Tehran and 73 km southwest of Qum (Hakemi 1990). The existence of a palatial complex there has been known since the tenth century ad, thanks to the two seven-meter-tall standing columns crowned with Ionic-type capitals. E. Herzfeld was the first western archaeologist who paid attention to the site, visiting it in the 1920s. He interpreted the ruins as those of a Seleucid temple, a hypothesis that was considered valid for many decades until the ceramics found during more recent extensive excavations and further studies on the columns pointed to a date during the Parthian period for the construction of the monumental buildings.

Susa and the Southwest

In the southwest of Iran the metropolis of Susa, a relevant urban center for many centuries, continued to play a fundamental role also within the Parthian Empire as proved by the archaeological excavations. Lying in the middle of a fertile region the city, a Greek refoundation, maintained Greek municipal institutions. A series of inscriptions (9/8 BC–AD 1/2) mentions a group of officers bearing Greek titles like *strategos* and *somatophylax*, of Greek and Iranian origins, who seem to have ruled the city in collaboration with the royal satrap of Susiana (Cumont 1930; 1931).

The most remarkable document is the famous letter of Artabanus (ad 21), now at the Louvre Museum, in which the Great King Artabanus II (ad 12–38/41) supports the reelection of one of his most faithful "friends of the first rank" and "bodyguards," Hestiaios, son of Asios, to the office of city treasurer. This was against the city rules, which would force the king's man to wait few years before being allowed to again present his candidature. The document clearly

demonstrates that also under Parthian rule the Greek city institutions not only existed, but still played a pivotal role in the city's ruling system (Cumont 1932; Merkelbach 2002; Rougemont 2014).

Archaeological investigations showed that the metropolis flourished under the Arsacids and that Susa's prosperity even increased in comparison with the Seleucid period (Boucharlat 1987; Martinez-Seve 2002). The mounds of the Apadana and Royal Town and the area of the old Achaemenid Propylea had residential neighborhoods of large houses and finely decorated residences. The Parthian levels yielded abundant material—pottery, but also coins, sometimes in hoards, figurines in a variety of materials, and sculptures. Among the latter the most remarkable piece is the head of a woman encircled by a turreted crown, identified as Queen Mousa (Cumont 1939a; Parlasca 2002).

The numerous graves found everywhere attest to the density and size of the population of the Parthian city (Boucharlat and Haerinck 2011). The characteristic jar burials are present, most often interred within the houses. Other forms of burial attested to especially in the Chantier de la Ville des Artisans, are the anthropoid sarcophagi or burial chambers containing furniture.

The presence of the royal governor of the satrapy of Susiana in the city recorded by many documents suggests that municipal officers and royal appointed dignitaries collaborated in ruling the city and surrounding region. Susa had an important mint, which produced both local bronze coinage and Parthian royal coins. This situation radically changed around ad 45, when the city and the whole Susiana region came under the authority of the kings of Elymais, one of the southern Arsacid vassal kingdoms.

Descendants of a tribe of marauders inhabiting the Bakhtiari Mountains, the Elymaean kings, the Kamnaskirids, gradually enlarged their area of political influence from the vital mountain passes and the high mountain-top sanctuaries, as far as the plains of Susiana (fig. 33.3).

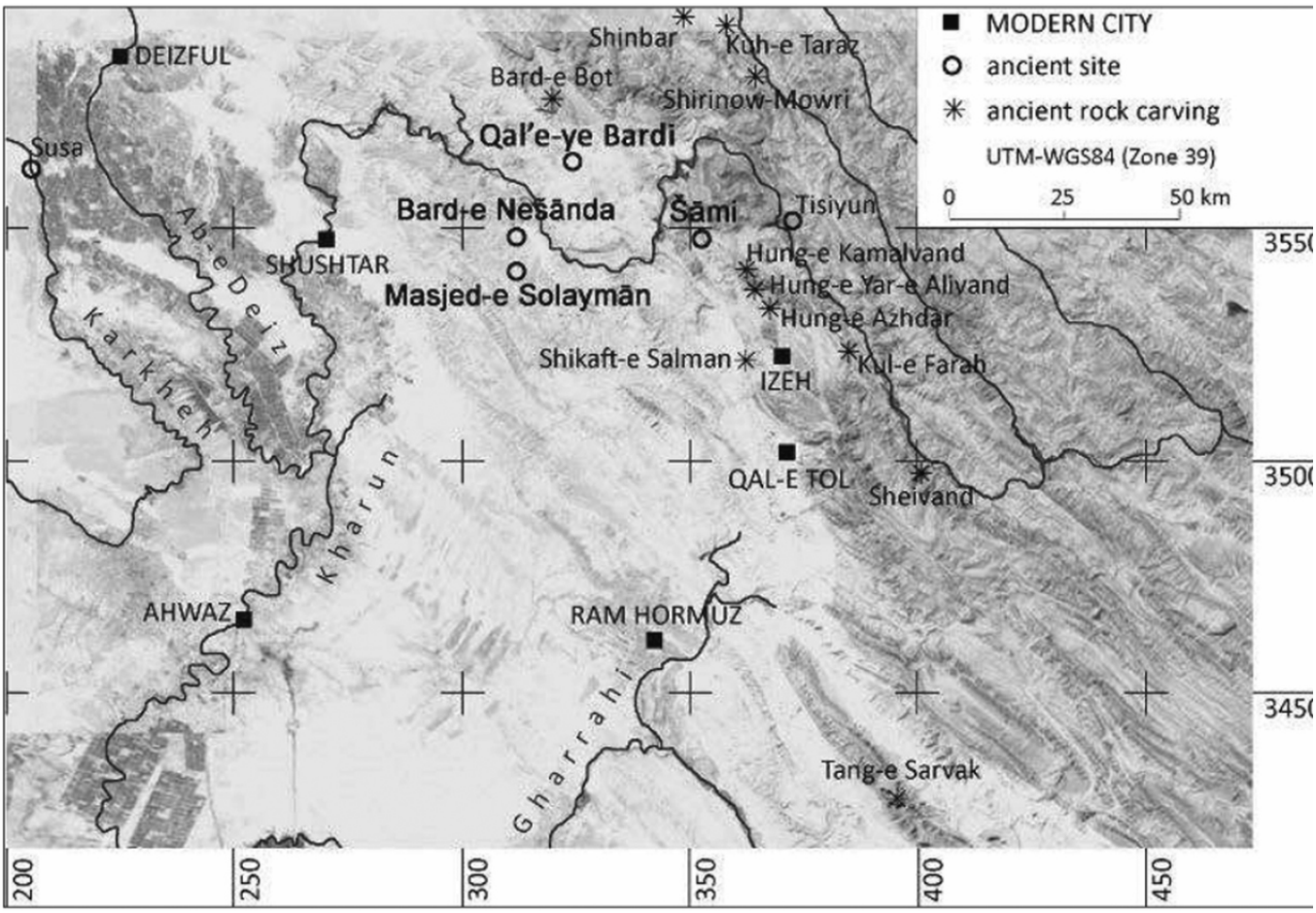

FIGURE 33.3. Map of the highlands of present-day Khuzestan (ancient Elymais) (V. Messina).

The archaeological investigations conducted by R. Ghirshman on the Bakhtiari Mountains, the core of the Elymaean kingdom, individuated a series of sites characterized by an evident religious function. Two settlements seem prominent for architectural complexity: Masjid-i Sulaiman and Bard-e Neshandeh (Ghirshman 1969; 1970; 1972; 1976). They went through various phases during their long existence. Masjid-i Sulaiman (second century bc–beginning of the third century ad; Salaris and Dan 2023) is 40 km from Shustar on the road that runs through the mountains to the Iranian Plateau. There a group of edifices had been erected on adjacent platforms. The main buildings are temples attributed to Athena, Herakles, and Mithra and Anahita. The latter seems to have been destroyed and rebuilt, probably during a Seleucid or Arsacid expedition aimed at laying hands on the sanctuary's treasures (Str. 16.1.18). The remains of monumental statues wearing tiaras link the site to local royal authority. Not far from there, a similar complex exists at Bard-e Neshandeh, protected by walls and built on artificial platforms. A series of temples can be seen there as well. Also at Bard-e Neshandeh the main temple seems to be dedicated to Mithra and Anahita (second century ad). Close to a stair ramp leading to the main platform a text carved on the rock recorded the visitors to the sanctuary, that the holy place was exempt from taxes by the will of Kamnaskires I the great king of Elymais, founder of the dynasty, probably at that time not yet dependent on the Parthian Crown (second century bc; Harmatta 1989).

A third religious complex, that includes three cultural platforms, has been discovered recently at Shami (Kal-e Chandar: Baqherian et al. 2016; Bucci et al. 2017; Cellerino and Foietta 2020) further east, close to the place where the famous *Shami Prince*, a bronze statue probably

depicting a member of the local Elymaean aristocracy, now at the National Museum in Tehran, has been found (Cumont 1939b; Seyrig 1939). Here as in the other sanctuaries the remains of bronze statues and monumental pedestals suggest a form of royal or ancestral cult, a circumstance surely connected with the many burials found all around the platforms (second century ad).

The mountainous region of Elymais is rich in rock bas-reliefs commemorating members of the local ruling dynasties while facing an enemy, attending or performing religious rituals or political ceremonies of investiture.

The most ancient and by far the most discussed concerning its interpretation is the rock relief at Khung-i Nauruzī, dated to the second century bc (Vanden Berghe 1963; 1983, 48, 120–121; Mathiesen 1985; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 33–37; Kawami 1987, 119–125, 209–213; Salaris 2023). A figure on horseback wearing a diadem, symbol of royal power, rides from the left into the middle of the scene where four dignitaries stand waiting. These figures' robes and hair dress look very similar to the later depictions of member of the local Elymaean court from other sites. Above the mounted king and the principal dignitary, two eagles holding two diadems in their talons indicate the bestowal of the royal authority.

According to the traditional interpretation, the mounted king would be the Parthian Arsaces, king of kings portrayed in the act of acknowledging the authority of the local Kamnaskirid dynasty over southwest Iran. The local dignitaries with Kamnaskires at their head are gathered to meet and pay homage to the superior king of Parthia and offer their submission, the founding act of the local dynasty. The Arsaces has been identified as Mithridates I, due to the resemblance between the riding king and the effigy on his coins (Messina 2014).

Invernizzi dates the relief to between the end of the first and beginning of the second century ad instead, when the original Kammaskirid dynasty was substituted by one closer to the Arsacids, the Orodids. According to the Italian scholar a later monarch, member of the latter dynasty would be responsible for the carved scene, which would represent his ancestor paying homage to an idealized Parthian king of the past or maybe a Seleucid one (Invernizzi 1988). By recalling a ceremony of investiture that took place in the distant past, the new kings of Elymais wanted to reaffirm their right to rule their kingdom and the city of Susa, under their control since ad 45.

All Elymaean is the interpretation of the scene by V. Messina. Thanks to comparisons with Elymaean coins, he identifies the king on horseback as Kammnaskires III or IV (first century bc) who probably celebrated himself after a victory over Susa or the Arsacids (Messina and Mehr Ki an 2015). The other figures according to him were added more than one century later (Messin a, Rinaldo, and Mehr Kian 2014; Messina and Mehr Kian 2015). They represent a member of the later dynasty, Kammnaskires Orodes (second century ad), who wanted to depict himself in connection with the victorious member of the former dynasty in order to point out the continuity and legitimacy of his own rule (Messina 2014).

The interpretation of all the other Elymaean reliefs is much less problematic. They seem to have been conceived by the later dynasts ruling the kingdom (the Orodids). At Tang-i Sarvak the king, Orodes, is often portrayed and celebrated in various court or religious scenes. He is portrayed while meeting and receiving the homage of court dignitaries, whose names are inscribed close to their figures. Other scenes depict the king fighting wild animals or charging enemy soldiers, in full armor riding a metal-clad horse, or sacrificing in front of a baetylus at the head of two ranks of courtiers. In one scene the king lying on a bed seems to be discussing with a couple of deities, perhaps Athena/Anahita and Artemis/Nanaia (Henning 1952; Seyrig 19 70; Vanden Berghe 1983, 122–125; Mathiesen 1986; Kawami 1987, 89–91, 188–192; von Gall 2000; Kawami 2013, 756–761). There is no reference to a superior royal authority other than

the local monarchy. The Tang-i Sarvak monuments are dated to between the mid-second and beginning of the third century ad (Vardanjan 1997).

Other reliefs at Tang-e Botan (Shinbar), a probable cult center, depict local dignitaries and members of the local sacerdotal class (Vanden Berghe 1983, 121–122; Kawami 1987, 179–184; 2013, 763–764). At Khung-i Kamalwand a mounted warrior named Phraates receives the homage of a lower-rank dignitary, who is pouring liquid from a vessel. Other scenes at Khung-i Yar-i ʿAliwand, Kuh-i Tina (Bard-i But), and Kuh-i Taraz depict men standing in Parthian dress or investiture scenes (Hinze 1963; Vanden Berghe 1983, 48–50, 121–122; Kawami 1987, 128). Smaller reliefs have been found at Shaivand, Shirinow, and Kuh-e Mongast (Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 39–53; Kawami 1987, 126–130, 204–222; Mehr Kian 1997; 2000; 2001).

Other Minor Sites

On a small island in the Persian Gulf, Kharg Island, a few kilometers from the Iranian coast, a couple of hypogeic funerary complexes have been brought to light. Some of the architectural characteristics and decorative elements of the structures, conceived to hold about ninety graves, are similar to features in the tombs of the Syrian trade city of Palmyra. It has been suggested that there, like on the not-so-distant Tylos Island, nowadays Bahrain, a group of Palmyrene traders established a merchant colony in order to exert their influence over the Gulf sea routes (Ghirshman 1958; 1959; Haerinck 1975; Gregoratti 2019). Recent research by M.-J. Steve puts this interpretation into discussion. An inscription written in Judaeo-Aramaic seems instead to attest to the presence of Jewish merchants on the island in the middle of the first century AD (Steve et al. 2003, 59–67). It seems these traders were connected with the south Arsacid vassal kingdom of Characene (Gregoratti 2011).

Parthian-period cemeteries have been excavated all over modern Iran: at Garmi, in Media Atropatene, in the Gilan region, close to the Caspian Sea and at Veliran, close to Tehran, where a family hypogeum was excavated (Nemati et al. 2011). In the south, at Damba Koh, in Kerman province, the ancient Carmania, three thousand Arsacid and Sasanian cairn and pit-graves were found and at Cheram in the south-western Zagros, a tomb with a rich collection of pottery, bronze bowls, and weapons (Roustaei and Azadi 2011).

The most spectacular discovery of recent years deserves a conclusive mention. In 2010, in the salt mine at Chehrabad near Zanjan in the northeast of Iran, the mummified bodies of six workmen were found. They probably died when the galleries they were working in collapsed. Two of them with the characteristic long hair and beard have been dated to the late Parthian period or more probably to the early Sassanid period (Aali et al. 2012). This discovery will contribute to shedding light for once on the lives of the most humble men of Arsacid/Sassanid society, those same men, who materially built the more famous and known cities and palaces of Arsacid Iran and central Asia.

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CHAPTER 34

PARTHIAN HATRA AND THE ARTISTIC *KOINÈ* IN THE FIGURATIVE ARTS OF THE SYRIAN-MESOPOTAMIAN STEPPE

LUCINDA DIRVEN

Monuments from Hatra, a pre-Islamic city located on the north Mesopotamian steppe about 80 km southwest of modern Mosul, are widely regarded as prime examples of Parthian art. In this almost circular fortified city with a diameter of 2 km, archaeologists have found spectacular architectural remains of temples and houses, about three hundred sculptures, over five hundred Aramaic inscriptions, as well as numerous graffiti and small finds, all dating from the fairly short period between AD 100 and AD 240. Combined, they provide a truly exceptional insight into daily life in a Parthian city in northern Mesopotamia during the second and third centuries AD. Unfortunately, the city is still comparatively little studied and, given the political situation in present-day Iraq, access to the finds is difficult (Dirven 2013a, 10–13). This also holds true for the sculptural monuments that are central to this article. Although they are commonly put on a par with sculptural remains from cities close to the Syrian side of the border, they have never been studied in much detail.

Research at Hatra first started at the beginning of the last century, with the German expedition led by Walter Andrae, who was working in Assur at the time (Andrae 1908 and 1912). The Iraq State Board of Antiquities started the excavation and restoration of the site in 1951 and worked at Hatra with some interruptions till the outbreak of the war in 2013 (Safar and Mustafa 1974; numerous articles in Iraqi journals, notably by the Iraqi scholar Wathiq al-Salihi). An Italian team led by Roberta Venco Ricciardi worked at Hatra and in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad at intervals from 1987 onwards, concentrating on domestic architecture and the early history of the buildings in the central temenos. Virtually all finds from Hatra have remained in Iraq, either on the site itself or in one of the museums in the country, especially the National Iraq Museum in Baghdad and Mosul Museum.

From mid-2014 to April 2017, Hatra was part of the territory of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. No assessment of the actual damage done by these religious fanatics has been published to date, but preliminary reports and photographs show that the main buildings are still standing. The figurative sculpted architectural decoration though, was intentionally damaged by shooting, causing these sculptures to shatter into innumerable pieces. Even worse was the damage done in the Museum of Mosul, where about one third of the statues from Hatra were stored at the time. A video posted in February 2015 shows ISIS followers smashing to pieces the Hatra statues still on display (an unknown number were brought to safety in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad).

Hatra is located in an arid region, with an annual rainfall of less than 200 mm, and may therefore truly be called a desert city. Although it has several watering points, it is important to stress it is not an oasis like Palmyra. Very little is known about the history of the site before its sudden and short flowering period that lasted from the end of the first century ad until ad 240. In view of the site's water resources it is extremely plausible that it was a camping place for nomads from a very early date, but settlement can only be traced back to the first centuries

before the Common Era (Venco Ricciardi and Peruzzetto 2013). Most of the monuments that still stand today date from the second and first half of the third century (Downey 1988, 161–173).

For the greater part of this period, Hatra was associated in some way with the Parthian Empire (Hauser 1998). At some point after the Arsacid dynasty was defeated by the Sasanians in the 220s, a Roman garrison was stationed in the city. The city was conquered in ad 240 by the Sasanian ruler Ardashir and his son Shapur, after an unusually long siege of two (or even four) years (Hauser 2013, 119–139). When captured, it was probably quickly abandoned by most of the population and never inhabited again, which explains the excellent preservation of its monuments.

The reasons for Hatra's sudden growth are a matter of conjecture, and many aspects of its short history are still a mystery (Kaizer 2013). The city, particularly the territory around the city, must have been of great strategic importance to both the Parthians and the Romans, who battled for its control. For the greater part of its history, however, Hatra was located on the fringe of the Parthian Empire. Roman historians tell us that on three occasions Roman troops—led by Trajan in ad 117 and by Septimius Severus in ad 197 and 199—attempted in vain to conquer the city (Cass. Dio 68.31 and 72.11 and Hdn. 3.9.3–9). The Parthian kings, in order to control the region, allied themselves with the Hatrene rulers and through them controlled the surrounding area. Inscriptions refer to the Hatrene ruler as "king of Arab," which suggests Hatra's territory was known as Arab and the settled and nomadic population in its territory were called Arabs (Dijkstra 1990, 96–97; Gregoratti 2013, 48–50). This region increased in significance after the province of Oshroene fell into Roman hands in ad 165 and Hatra's territory became the most western frontier of the Parthian Empire. As a result, the Arsacid king of kings granted the rulers of Hatra the title *mlk'*, "king" (Hauser 1998, 516).

In addition to being a political center, the city probably fulfilled a commercial function as well. Following Hauser (2000, 193–195), several scholars have stressed the role of commerce in Hatra's growth (Sommer 2003; Freyberger 2004, 8–18). Although commerce must have played a role, and import was indispensable in this arid environment, it is misleading to call Hatra a "caravan city" since this was not its primary function (Millar 1998) and was probably not the reason the city developed in the first place. The road system that surrounds the city makes clear, however, that Hatra was not an isolated settlement in the Jazirah, but was connected to the center of the Arsacid kingdom as well as the confines of that territory (Altaweel and Hauser 2004; Gregoratti 2013, 50).

Third, Hatra served as a regional center of pilgrimage for both the nomadic and settled population in its territory (Dirven 2006–2007). People from outside visited the city to pay homage to its gods and its ruler, who wielded supreme religious power in the city. As such, religion played a prominent role in uniting Hatra with the people in its territory. The crucial role of religion for Hatra's development can be deduced from the words, *htr' dšmš*, "enclosure of Shamash" on Hatrene coins, which suggests that the whole city was dedicated to Shamash (Walker 1958, 167. Cf. Dijkstra 1995, 176–177). The importance of religion is also clear from the huge walled enclosure (440 × 320 m) at the center of the city, which had a religious function (fig. 34.1).

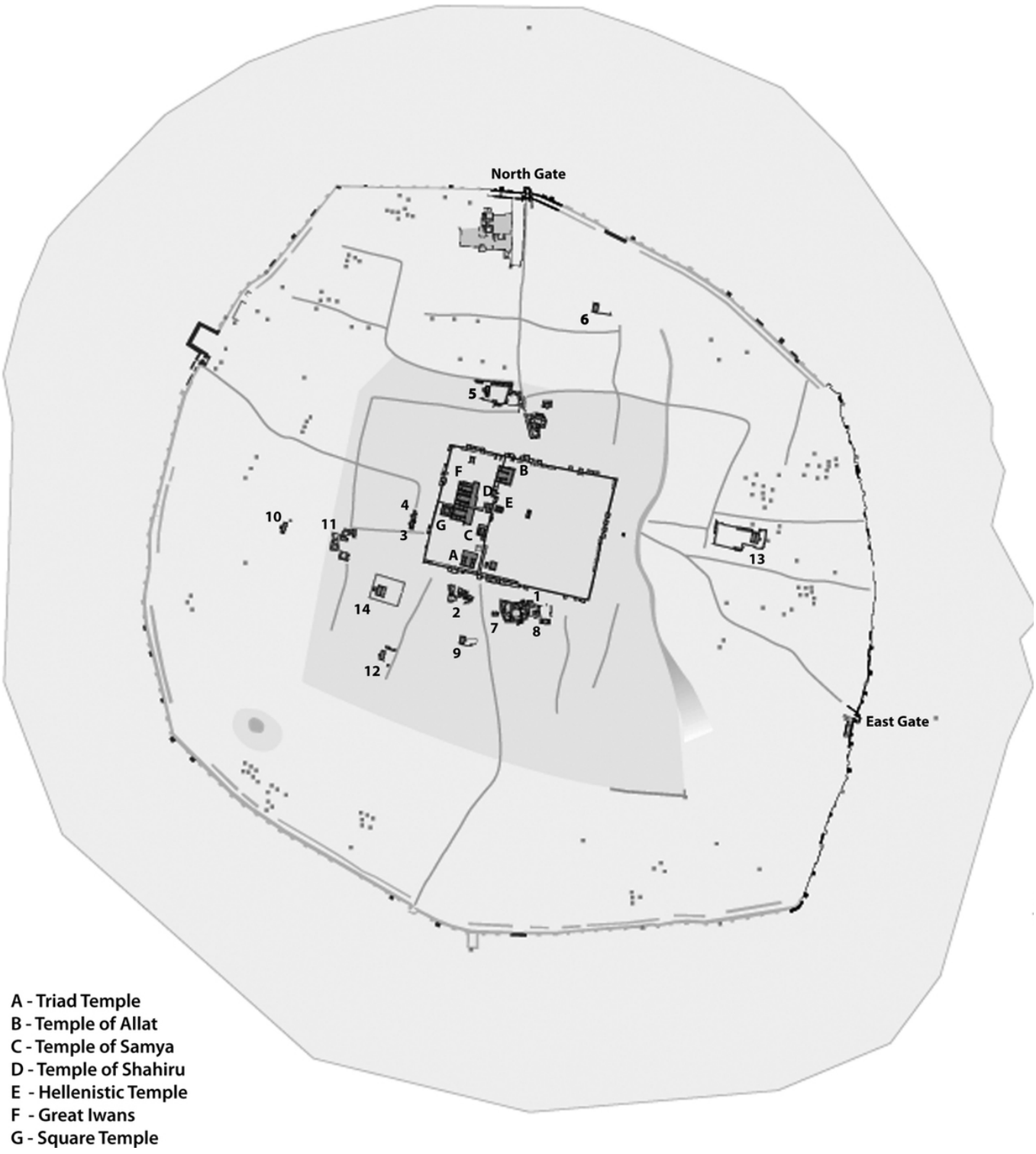

FIGURE 34.1. Hatra groundplan @ centro di scavi, Torino.

The central temenos is divided by a wall into a huge forecourt and a much smaller court where the main structures are situated. The large structure located at the back of the smaller court of the temenos is the oldest and most important one. Its façade is 110 m long. Behind this façade are three separate buildings that in turn consist of enormous halls covered by barrel vaults, the so-called iwans. They are referred to as the south, north, and twin iwans, respectively. A wall running from east to west divides the small court in two and separates the

north and south iwans. A mysterious square structure was later built against the back of the south iwan. It possibly functioned as the fire temple of the Hatrene kings and as such testifies to the influx of Iranian traditions (Dirven 2011 and 2022b). We know from the inscriptions that the remainder of the complex was the home of Hatra's most important gods: Maren, "our Lord," and Barmaren, "the son of our Lord" (Kaizer 2000a).

In addition to the main temple, three more temples are situated in the west court. They are known as the temples of Sahiru, Samya, and the triad. In all likelihood, none of the three names covers the actual cult. In the forecourt, against the back of the dividing wall, is a temple that was dedicated to the goddess Allat, and in the forecourt proper is the Hellenistic temple (so called because of its appearance, not because it dates back to this period) (Downey 1988, 161). Again, Maren is the main recipient of the invocations preserved in this building.

Apart from the enormous religious complex in the center of the city, a further fourteen small shrines have been excavated in the domestic area around the temenos (Downey 1988; Jakubiak 2014). By convention, they are known according to the sequence in which they were excavated. Since the deities to whom the small shrines were dedicated are frequently unknown, it is best to maintain this tradition. Most temples consist of a broad pronaos with a shallow naos projecting from the center of its back wall: a so-called reversed T temple plan. It is also referred to as the Babylonian ground plan, a name that alludes to its millennia-old tradition in the region.

Hatra's figurative arts consist mainly of sculptures; unlike Dura-Europos, for example, Hatra has yielded few wall paintings (al-Salihi 1996). We can distinguish three main groups of sculptures: sculpted architectural decoration, stele, statues, and figurines of deities, and statues of human beings, most of which are slightly over life-size. Before discussing these sculptures in more detail, we first turn to the concept of a Syrian-Mesopotamian artistic *koinè*.

A Syrian-Mesopotamian *Koinè*

The sculptural monuments from Hatra are frequently grouped together with figurative monuments from cities in Roman Syria, especially Palmyra (Mathiesen 1992). Even historians like Albert de Jong, who stress Hatra's firm position in the Parthian commonwealth, state that the figurative arts are an exception because these are profoundly influenced by the West (de Jong 2013, 143). The idea of a common culture in the Syrian-Mesopotamian Desert goes back to Michael Rostovtzeff's article "Dura and the Problem of Parthian Art," which was published in 1935. Rostovtzeff argued that the figurative arts from cities on the western border of the Parthian or Arsacid Empire, such as Dura-Europos, Palmyra, Edessa, and Hatra, show the same stylistic characteristics because they were all inspired by the arts at the Parthian court in Ctesiphon. These features are two-dimensionality, paratactic rendering of the human body, emphasis on the details of elaborate jewelry and clothing, linear rather than plastic detail, row composition, isocephaly, and the frontal representation of both human and divine figures, even in narrative representations (Rostovtzeff 1935, 182, 235–238). Today, most scholars reject the idea that a cultural Arsacid center stands at the basis of this art (Dirven 2016). Instead, they stress the artistic independence of these so-called frontier cities during the first three centuries AD. However, the stylistic characteristics of Parthian art that Rostovtzeff first formulated are still considered an adequate description of this presumed artistic *koinè* (Dirven 2016).

Various explanations have been advanced to explain this supposed shared culture that transcends political divisions. I restrict myself to the most influential ones. Lately, much stress has been laid on the economic permeability of the Roman frontier and the concept of the

frontier as a zone rather than a line, in which people and goods could easily move from one region to the other (Whittaker 1994; Isaac 1990, 139–140, 418–426; Pollard 2004, 119–144; Sommer 2005). In addition, the cities in this region are thought to be largely independent of the central powers, be they Rome or Parthia. Supposedly, these cities made and broke political alliances easily, solely motivated by personal gain (Drijvers 1977, 803). Last but not least, some scholars assume that central authority was lacking in the Parthian Empire during the first two centuries of the Common Era, which provided the cities in their realm with great freedom (Sarkhosh-Curtis 2007, 20–21).

The idea of an artistic *koinè* can be criticized on historical and methodological grounds and is undermined by a detailed study of the material culture from Hatra and other cities in the Syrian-Mesopotamian Desert. Although there is indeed unambiguous proof of the idea that people and goods could and did move easily from one region in the Syrian-Mesopotamian Desert to another (Dirven 2013b, esp. 48 n. 2), it does not follow that the culture on either side of this border was the same. Studies of frontier zones in other periods show that such regions are indeed characterized by a common culture of the frontier in contrast to that of the opposing centers. At the same time, however, material from frontier regions also shows that people on either side of the political border frequently do their best to distinguish themselves from their neighbors (Burke 2009, 75–76). Despite cultural similarities, they may opt for several important identity markers related to the central powers to which they belong. And even when the same cultural symbols are used on either side of the frontier, subtle differences may result in a very different meaning. We may assume that such divides intensify in times of political conflict, but the situation is not dependent upon conflict alone. There was probably also an inner drive to assimilate cultural elements of the central political powers that served as a source of social power.

The view that central political powers hardly influenced the culture of their subjects is at odds with recent studies on "Romanization" that emphasize the role of indigenous elite groups in the process. This approach revolves around the idea that the coming of Rome resulted, consciously or unconsciously, in a realignment of social relations. Within this redirection, Roman culture is thought to have played an important part. In order to establish and confirm their elevated social position, elite groups aligned their interests with those of Rome. In order to do so, they forged a connection with the Roman occupiers to become more like them (Butcher 2003). One way of doing this was by adopting Roman cultural elements or by incorporating Roman cultural elements into one's own culture.

Recent studies of various aspects of Palmyrene culture, the important caravan city on the other side of the border, emphasize the impact of Roman rule upon the material culture of Palmyra's elite. Roman influences to a large extent determined Palmyra's public and religious architecture and inspired its honorific sculptures, funerary portraits, and other funerary monuments such as sarcophagi and mausoleums (already Parlasca 1985. Cf. Wielgosz-Rondolino 2016 and Dirven 2017). Surprisingly, this redirection in Palmyrene research has not resulted in a re-evaluation of the cultural remains of Hatra and the relationship between the material culture of Hatra and Palmyra. If Palmyra's elite affiliated itself with Rome, one would expect the rulers and elite of Hatra to look to their own political overlords, the Parthian king of kings (Dirven 2022c).

The idea that the *koinè* in the figurative arts is the result of the relatively independent status of cities in these regions is also largely unfounded. Not only was Palmyra well embedded in the Roman Empire, but the presumed independent status of Hatra within the Arsacid Empire has also recently been convincingly disputed in an article by Albert de Jong (de Jong 2013). In fact, the conjecture of independence is based on very little evidence. De Jong argues that the evidence we do have suggests that Hatra belonged to the Parthian commonwealth, a region

within the orbit of the Arsacid Empire but not inhabited predominantly by Parthians or Iranians. In this commonwealth, de Jong posits, the elites shared a certain culture that connected them both with the Parthian king of kings and with each other: a situation, in fact, that is very similar to what was happening on the other side of the border with respect to Roman cultural elements.

The difficulty is, of course, to reconstruct this commonwealth on the basis of the material available. Our insight into this process is greatly hampered by the lack of Parthian material. In fact, Hatra itself is among the most important sources of evidence on this commonwealth, and there is therefore a risk of us running around in circles. For this reason, a comparison with material from cities in the West is crucial. In our search for the Parthian aspects in Hatra's culture, a comparison with Palmyra, a city on the other side of the border, may be of great help. Of course, the method should not be to compare the two and ascribe all differences to Parthian influence. Some of the differences may be due to specific local circumstances. Furthermore, not all cultural forms are equally meaningful for the construction of a political cultural identity. We have to seek out those aspects of material culture that play a special role in the construction of these communities and that connect them to the political orbit to which they belong. Of course, we are much better informed about such symbols in the Roman world than in the Parthian world. Here, in spite of local differences and interpretations, certain material remains such as funerary portraits, honorary statues, and mosaics connect the local elites with the Roman powers and with each other (Butcher 2003). Although it is difficult to identify the same symbols within the Arsacid Empire, one could argue that it is telling if "Roman" symbols are missing on the other side of the border. Given the existence of open frontiers, such differences become even more meaningful.

Analysis of Sculptural Remains

Although the sculptures from Hatra are frequently grouped together with figurative monuments from other Syrian-Mesopotamian cities, they have never been studied in great detail (Ingholt 1 951; Homes-Frederique 1954). Recent studies into the art from other cities in the region, such as Palmyra or Dura-Europos, have in fact shown that there are remarkable differences among them (Hauser 2014; Dirven 2016). The first thing that needs to be done, therefore, is to describe and analyze the sculptures from Hatra in more detail (Dirven, forthcoming). Only then can we compare them to sculptural monuments from Syria and attempt to relate the outcome to the little that is known about Hatra's political situation.

Architectural Decoration

Syrian influence is most conspicuous in the sculptured architectural decoration from Hatra (Ven co-Ricciardi 2015). Such monuments are mainly found in the temples located in the great temenos, which are without doubt the most important religious buildings in the city. Although none of the architectural decoration is securely dated by an inscription, it is possible to date the buildings approximately. Provided the building and its decoration are contemporaneous, the date of the architecture provides us with a date for the sculptures too. This enables us to reconstruct the stylistic development of the architectural decoration from the beginning of the second century to about AD 180, when the last temple in the great temenos was finished.

The earliest architectural decoration is part of the north and south iwan complexes in the great temenos; it can be dated by means of inscriptions to the reign of Lord Worod (ca. ad 105–115) (Safar 1973, 91; Gregoratti 2013, 52). This means the buildings were already

standing when Trajan besieged the city in ad 117–118. Among the architectural decoration we find human busts that decorate the stones of the arches of the façade. In addition, several stones of the façade feature full-length figures or animals in relief. The masks that decorate the interior may be seen as another category of architectural decoration. Particularly rich in decoration are the doors of the north and south iwans (Venco-Ricciardi 2015, 209–215). They stand out for the naturalistic modelling of the figures and lively representation of the subject matter that is inspired by classical models.

The source of inspiration for this architectural decoration came in all likelihood from Syria. Most known parallels come from Palmyra, but it is perhaps more likely that inspiration (or artists?) came from Antioch, the artistic center that probably influenced Palmyra as well (von G all 1970, 8). The lavish decoration of doorframes is typical of Syria and probably originated here. Parallels can also be found for individual motifs, such as the griffins on the door soffit, the centauromachia, and the Medusa heads. Finally, the practice of decorating stones of arches with figures was clearly inspired by the West (Venco-Ricciardi 2015, 215). The influence of Syrian motifs at the beginning of the second century is confirmed by a Hatrene coin from the period of Lord Worod that bears the legend SC. Whether the Hatrenes were familiar with the meaning *Senatus Consultum* is extremely dubious, but it is clear that they were consciously imitating Roman coins, probably issues from Antioch (Hartmann and Luther 2002, 163–164).

In order to assess Roman influence in Hatra, it is important to establish how these motifs were interpreted locally and how they developed over time. It is noteworthy that from the start, western motifs were not only copied, but also adapted to local taste. This is nicely illustrated by a lintel from the temple of Allat, which was constructed about sixty years after the north and south iwans (fig. 34.2).

FIGURE 34.2. Lintel from the Temple of Allat. @ Stephan Hauser.

Allat's temple is the most sumptuously decorated temple in the great temenos and is the last of the temples that was built here. The lintel depicts the goddess riding a camel and being received by a number of figures, followed by a vine scroll peopled by busts of musicians. In his in-depth analysis of this frieze, Antonio Invernizzi showed that—with the exception of the figure

of the mounted goddess—all figures in this enigmatic scene derive from classical models that are employed here in a new and original way (Invernizzi 1989). It is noteworthy that, except for the goddess, the figures are not depicted facing full front, but are in profile, three-quarter view, or are even seen from the back. The rendering of their bodies, however, is rather flat, and the folds of their clothes do not follow the body underneath. The lintel from Allat's temple shows that classical motifs remained popular in the architectural decoration of temples in the great temenos, but that the style became less naturalistic and more abstract and decorative over time.

The architectural decoration of the buildings in the great temenos in Hatra suggests Roman influence was particularly strong during the earliest period, at the time when the monumental city came into being (ca. ad 110–130). Since hardly any motifs were added to the classical repertoire later on, and classical motifs became less refined over time, it is probable that western influence also petered out quite early. Hence Erik Mathiesen's conclusion that art in the Syrian-Mesopotamian Desert was subject to a strong western influence in late Parthian times (i.e., ad 200–220) does not apply to Hatra (Mathiesen 1992, 14). In this respect, we may note a marked difference from the monuments from Roman Palmyra and Dura-Europos, where western influence was constantly renewed.

It is tempting to relate this to the little we know about Hatra's political situation. We first read about Hatra in western literary sources in ad 117, when the emperor Trajan was besieging the city because it had revolted against Roman rule. Very little is known about Hatra before the siege of 117. Whether the nascent city adhered to the Romans or the Parthians is not certain. Possibly the situation was fairly ambiguous at first. Be that as it may, we do know that the city expanded substantially shortly after the siege of 117. In a recent article, Leonardo Gregoratti suggested that the Parthian king of kings favored the rulers of Hatra with certain privileges as a reward for their resistance to Rome and service towards their empire (Gregoratti 2013, 52). The frantic building activity in Hatra during the first half of the second century accords well with Gregoratti's hypothesis. So does the cessation of direct western influence. The western forms that were adopted at an early date remain in vogue, but western influences were not renewed. The survival of western motifs was not at odds with the political situation. As part of the architectural decoration of the great iwans such motifs were part of Hatra's visual language and as such no longer associated with Rome.

Life-Size Statues

A similar case may be made for the life-size statues at Hatra. They too were initially influenced by Roman prototypes, but were adapted to the local situation, both with respect to iconography and, perhaps more important, their use. In total, about 120 statues in the round of people have been discovered (Dirven 2008). With some exceptions, these statues are slightly larger than life-size (about 1.90 m high). Like all sculptures from Hatra, they are dated between the beginning of the second century and AD 240. Most of these statues have been found inside the temples, sometimes in situ, on consoles attached to the walls. We may distinguish statues of kings, of priests, nobles, military, and women. What stands out when one studies these statues is the limited variation with respect to dimensions, pose, costume, and attributes. Little attention has been paid to individual facial features. In fact, even humans of great prominence, such as the Hatrene kings, are recognizable only by their hairstyle and headdress and not by individual outward characteristics (fig. 34.3).

FIGURE 34.3. Statue of King Sanatruq I. @Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.

There is a great sense of "professionalism" in these statues: people "look like" their social position.

Over time, there is very little development with respect to size, pose, and clothing. We may note, however, a diminution in naturalism in the rendering of the faces. The earliest portraits have facial features like wrinkles and labial folds, traits that are missing in later portraits, which are as a result flatter and more expressionless. The treatment of the hair and the beard also becomes more schematic over the course of time. The facial features of the earliest portraits are reminiscent of Roman portraits. This western flavor is, however, outweighed by the oriental hairdo and costume of most statues. A comparison between the statue of Lord Nasru from the East Gate (al-Salihi 1991) and the "Roman" portrait found in the Triad Temple (Invernizzi 1986) clearly shows that it is hairdo and clothing that provides the statue with an oriental flavor, whereas the general inspiration for the portrait comes from the West. Equally illustrative in this respect are the female statues from Hatra. Whereas clothing and headdress give these statues a pronounced local flavor, the general pose more or less tallies with the so-called Ceres type of Roman origin. The baroque folds of the female statues are obviously of western inspiration too (Mathiesen 1989, 123).

Both the iconography of the sculptures from Hatra and the use of the life-size statues stand in marked contrast to free-standing statues from Palmyra, on the other side of the border. Here, most free-standing sculptures from the public sphere were made of bronze. Since these were later melted down, very few honorary sculptures have come down to us. The available evidence suggests they looked very different from the statues from Hatra. A bronze foot shod in a sandal that was found in the agora clearly derives from a statue of Graeco-Roman type, clad in a himation (Colledge 1976, 90, fig. 124; Dirven 2017, 124, fig. 6). This tallies with the few stone statues found in the agora, which—to judge from their pose, style, and clothing—clearly derive from Roman prototypes (Balty 2005, 321–341). One of the female statues belongs to the so-called Small Herculaneum type, the other to the Pudicitia type. The men are *togati*.

Not only was the iconography of the statues from Palmyra based on Roman prototypes, but their meaning and use also tallies with elite behavior in the Roman Empire. The statues' inscriptions and highly public places of display show that they were honorary statues in the Graeco-Roman sense of the word (Andrade 2013). As such, they place the inhabitants of Palmyra firmly in the elite culture of the Roman world. In Hatra, both the inscriptions and the positioning of life-size statues tell another story: these are statues that were erected by private persons in semi-public places such as temples; they have a strong religious undertone. As such, they have little to do with the custom of setting up honorary statues in Roman cities (Dirven 2008). In contrast, the painted portraits of worshippers in the temples of Dura-Europos resemble the Hatrene statues with respect to positioning, function, and meaning (Dirven 2008, 238–239). Whether this testifies to a practice that was widespread among the elite of the Parthian world is unfortunately not certain, due to lack of evidence in the remainder of the Arsacid Empire. But it is perhaps no coincidence that the only "Parthian" life-size bronze statue, the famous prince from Shami, was also found in a religious context (Colledge 1977, 86, fig. 13).

Far closer to the Hatrene statues with respect to pose, style, and costume are the funerary portraits and statues from Palmyra. The frontal pose of both the Hatrene and Palmyrene specimens strikes one immediately and provides these sculptures with an outward similarity. One should, however, not lose sight of the differences. As a medium, the Palmyrene funerary

portrait was inspired by western, Roman examples (Colledge 1996, 365). It is noteworthy that such portraits are missing altogether in the graves at Hatra (Dorna Metzger 2000). This is, of course a remarkable difference between the two cities, indicating that the degree of Roman influence in Palmyra was much stronger than in Hatra.

The comparison between Hatrene portraits and portraits from Palmyra shows that it is by no means self-evident to speak of an artistic *koinè* in the region. In fact, both in style and iconography there are substantial differences. The similarities between the portrait statues from these cities are largely confined to resemblances in dress, jewelry, weapons, and hairdo. It is these motifs that provide the sculptures with an Iranian flavor (Sarkosh-Curtis 2000, 30–33). But even here we must note an important difference, for we find far more Iranian influences in the apparel of Hatrene sculptures than in the sculptures from Palmyra (Colledge 1987, 19–28). In Palmyra, fashion has a bi-cultural character—in addition to Iranian elements, we also find Graeco-Roman components. In contrast, Graeco-Roman influences are extremely sparse in Hatrene dress. In fact, as we saw in the discussion of the earliest Hatrene portrait statues, hairdo and clothing give these statues an oriental flavor, whereas stylistically, inspiration largely came from the West. Western influence quickly dwindled, however, in sharp contrast to Palmyra, where it was constantly renewed.

Religious Iconography

We have a few life-size statues of deities from Hatra, proving that cult statues did exist in the Parthian world (Dirven 2015). By sheer chance, they are all of a nude Heracles figure, who is one of the most popular deities in Hatra, where he was worshipped under the name of Nergal and a host of other names (Dirven 2009). In addition to this god, the goddess Allat is pictured in the guise of the Greek Athena (Dirven 2022d). Despite their Graeco-Roman appearances, both deities seem to have been well integrated into the local pantheon, and it is doubtful whether the origin of their iconography tells us much about their character (Kaizer 2000b). Nor do such Graeco-Roman forms bear testimony to recent western influence. In fact, long before Rome arrived in the Near East, Mesopotamia was influenced by Hellenistic art and Hellenism (Dirven 2022a). Unfortunately, hardly anything is known about the arts in important Mesopotamian cities south of Hatra, such as Ctesiphon and Seleucia on the Tigris, but the little evidence we do have suggests that figurative art from these cities was still largely inspired by Hellenistic art during the first centuries AD. Over the course of several centuries, Greek forms had become part of Mesopotamian culture, and it is by no means self-evident that they were still considered foreign after such a long time. In fact, in all probability such forms had become detached from their original, ethnic connotation.

An excellent example of such a local assimilation of Greek forms is provided by the iconography of Maren and Barmaren, the two most important deities at Hatra (fig. 34.4).

FIGURE 34.4. The god Barmaren. Stele from Temple XIII @Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.

As a rule, these clean-shaven gods are depicted wearing a short tunic, mantle, and sandals. Their heads are surrounded by a diadem, and small horns grow from their foreheads, an iconographic feature that has so far been attested only in the divine iconography of Hatra. This outfit deviates from the clothing of minor Hatrene deities, who usually combine a tunic with trousers, and are bearded. Diadem and horns are a clear reference to the portraits of several Seleucid rulers. And indeed, tunic, mantle, and sandals also derive from this tradition (Dirven 2016). We may therefore conclude that the iconography of Hatra's most important gods derives from Seleucid royal iconography. This does not imply, however, that people were still aware of these Greek roots. Probably, this was no longer the case.

The iconography of these gods is, however, highly significant for Hatra's location on the Parthian side of the border and distinguishes Hatra from cities in Roman Syria, such as Palmyra. Before the advent of the Romans, Palmyrene deities wore the traditional strip-cuirass of Hellenistic origin. Around ad 80 the most prominent gods of the city—such as Iarhibol, Aglibol, and Arsu—exchanged their costume for the Roman body cuirass, the cuirass normally worn by the Roman emperor (Dirven 2011, 154–155). The same transformation took place in the representations of gods wearing traditional horned crowns from north Syria, as discussed above. It is telling for the political alliance of Hatra that the Roman body cuirass is not once attested in representations from the city. The distinct iconography of principal deities on either side of the border underlines the common tradition in the Syrian Mesopotamian cities but shows that this tradition was shaped according to the political situation.

Concluding Remarks

The examples discussed above do not pretend to be exhaustive, but aim to illustrate the pronounced local characteristics of the sculptural remains from Hatra. Some of the differences between the figurative art from Hatra and from cities on the other side of the border result from different political alliances. Although the Syrian-Mesopotamian Desert functioned as an open frontier between Parthia and Rome, cultural interaction clearly had its limits.

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CHAPTER 35

PALMYRA

OLYMPIA BOBOU

Early Tadmor/Palmyra

Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, described Palmyra as a city famous for its position: a site of pleasant springs in the middle of the desert, between Rome and Parthia, belonging to neither yet of interest to both powers (Plin., *HN* 5.88). Recent scholarship has shown that Pliny was not correct in his assertions that Palmyra was independent; instead, Palmyra had been drawn into the Roman sphere of influence by the time of Tiberius, almost fifty years before Pliny wrote his brief description of the city (see Gawlikowski 2010; 2021, 23; Kaizer 2020, 26–29; Raja 2022, 16). Pliny's assessment, however, of the importance of the location of Palmyra, as well as the reason for the existence of the settlement were correct. A change in the climate of the region that took place before 6000 BC, turned a previously fertile area suitable for the cultivation of grains (see Willcox, Fornite, and Herveux 2008) into a steppe desert, with a yearly rainfall that was no longer suitable for sustained agricultural production, only for grazing animals (see Bonacossi and Iamoni 2012; Jiménez et al. 2022). In such a climate, despite its sulphurous and not agreeable waters (unlike the "aquis amoensis" that Pliny had described: see recently Gawlikowski 2021, 23), the spring Efqa was crucial to the foundation of the city. The earliest evidence of habitation, consisting of small structures and pottery dated in the eighth millennium BC, are to be found in the area between the spring and the hill on which the sanctuary of Bel was later established (Hammad 2010, 8–9; al-Maqdissi and Ishaq 2017, 41–42; Gawlikowski 2021, 13–14). This area also yielded evidence of continuous habitation from the fourth millennium BC (al-Maqdissi and Ishaq 2018, 42–54).

This settlement was known as Tadmor in documents from the first half of the second millennium bc (Raja 2022, 12–13). While the continuous use of the name cannot be proven, this was also the name of the community that flourished in the Roman period. The name Palmyra first appears in the written sources in Appian's description of an event that supposedly happened in 41 bc: the attempted looting of the site by a cavalry unit under Mark Antony's command (for Appian's account, see Hekster and Kaizer 2004; see also Kaizer 2020, 26–27; Gawlikowski 2021, 22–23; Raja 2022, 15). In inscriptions, it appears first in a honorific decree from ad 140 (Yon 2012, cat. no. 246), although the adjective "Palmyrenes" appears much earlier, in an honorific decree of ad 24 (Yon 2012, cat. no. 16).

There is no evidence that Tadmor/Palmyra became settled by veterans of Alexander the Great after his conquest of the Achaemenid Empire. A fragmentary inscription mentioning a Hellenistic king indicates that the city was in contact with the Seleucid kingdom, but does not mean that it was under Seleucid control (Gawlikowski 2021, 21). The Hellenistic-period settlement was also in contact with Parthia, as excavations in a quarter at the south of the Roman city have revealed pottery from both the east and the west of Palmyra. Red- and black-glazed pottery from Antioch as well as Rhodian amphorae appear first in Palmyra from 200 bc, while Parthian glazed pottery is first found in the layers from 180–150 bc (Römer-Strehl 2013, and in particular pp. 7–13 for the finds from the earliest excavated phases of the quarter).

Further evidence for the wealth of some of the city's inhabitants and the international trade links of the city in the Hellenistic period is provided by two tombs: that of a man buried in a wooden coffin wearing objects of gold and semi-precious stones at the south-east necropolis (Tomb G) (Saito 2016; 2018), and an underground tomb complex from the middle of the second century ad in the area that would later be occupied by the sanctuary of Baalshamin (Fell mann 1970). Just as vital as housing and tombs were the sanctuaries for the life of the settlement. An inscription from 44 bc, indicates that the temple of Bel had already been established by then (Teixidor 1965, 59, cat. no. 100; Gawlikowski 2021, 22; for a more critical and cautious approach to the documentarian relating to the early phases of the sanctuary: Kaiz er 2002, 67–76). The excavations at the sanctuary of Allat, as well as epigraphic evidence, show that the temple to the goddess had been established by at least 31/30 bc. It was described as a *hamana*, a shrine housing the cult image, a statue of the seated goddess (Gawli kowski 2017, 28, 33–64; 2021, 21–22). Possibly also from the late Hellenistic period, are a series of fragments of reliefs found in the excavations of the temple of Bel, from the "Foundation T" of the enclosure that was created when the building works on the Roman-period temple began. These are some of the earliest artworks known from Palmyra: the figures are shown in profile, with large eyes, and their clothes are depicted in an almost-schematic, linear way. The reliefs include sacrifice scenes, riders of camels and horses, cuirassed warriors, and representations of deities (Seyrig 1941).

Palmyra between ad 1–100

It is in the Roman period that Palmyra emerges as a powerful and wealthy settlement. The *pax romana* created unprecedented opportunities for the trade of desirable goods and luxury products from India and China that were transported through the Euphrates, and the Palmyrenes were perfectly situated for taking advantage of them (see Seland 2016; 2019; Schö rle 2022; Yon 2022). It is possible that they were behind the shift from the route linking the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, via the passage at Zeugma, to a route that was shorter and passed through Palmyra, located almost in the middle of this new route (Gawlikowski 2021, 39). The city's elites used their accumulated wealth during the years of peace and prosperity to fund religious buildings, monumental family tombs, and public works and benefactions, changing the settlement from a small oasis town to a city that was described later as "the pearl of the desert."

By the reign of Tiberius (ad 14–37), Palmyra came under Roman control. This is evident mainly through the epigraphic evidence: inscribed border stones credit Creticus Silanus, governor of Syria between ad 13–17, as the one who defined the borders of Palmyrene territory, most likely for tax purposes. In the sanctuary of Bel, Minucius Rufus, the legate of the X Legio Fretensis, dedicated statues of Tiberius, Drusus, and Germanicus, while in 18/19 Germanicus settled Palmyrene tax matters and assigned diplomatic missions to the kingdoms of Mesene and Elam to Alexandros, a Palmyrene (Kaizer 2020, 26–29; Gawlikowski 2021, 25–26; Raja 202 2, 90–91; for the statues, see Yon 2012, cat. no. 3). In addition to arranging borders and taxes, it is likely that the Romans were responsible for the restructuring of the tribal system of Palmyra: while a confederation of at least seventeen known tribes were controlling the city in the pre-Roman period (Gawlikowski 2021, 24), their political role was diminished and the citizens were assigned to one of the "four tribes of the city" in the middle of the first century ad (Kaizer 2020, 28; Gawlikowski 2021, 30–32). Additionally, in ad 25, the Aramaic term *gbl tdmry'* was translated as *demos* by the scribe recording a bilingual decree honoring Malikû,

son of Nešâ, while the term *boule* for the council of the city appears in ad 74 (Kaizer 2020, 27; see also discussion in Yon 2012, cat. no. 19). These new terms may indicate further changes in Palmyra's civic structure.

At the same time, the settlement was also changing from a small town with few grand buildings—of which only foundations, architectural remains, and a few tombs have survived—to one of monumental tombs, sanctuaries, and public spaces. The earliest tower tombs can be dated to the end of the first century bc, but the construction of these imposing family tombs takes off in the first century ad, especially along the route connecting Palmyra to Emesa (modern-day Homs), in the western necropolis. They are a type of monument peculiar to Palmyra that can be distinguished from other free-standing tomb structures as they have multiple stories. On the façade, they have an inscription recording the foundation of the building, and by whom it would be used. The surviving inscriptions indicate that the Palmyrenes saw the tomb as their "house for eternity" and meant it to be used by the descendants of the founder (Colledge 1976, 62; Henning 2019). Having the multigenerational, extended family joined in a single monument was of primary importance to the Palmyrenes, judging by the popularity of this type and of subsequent family tomb types. In some cases, the tower tombs may also have an underground tomb with a separate entrance to that of the tower tomb. In this period, the burials are placed within loculi and closed off with slabs; it seems that the earliest slabs only had the inscribed name of the deceased; later slabs carry the portraits of the deceased. The concentration of tombs gave this necropolis the sobriquet "Valley of the Tombs" in scholarship (Gawlikowski 1970; Henning 2013; 2019; Raja 2022).

The existing sanctuaries of Bel and Allat were rebuilt on a much grander scale, leaving but few remains of the earlier structures. According to inscriptions, the sanctuary of Bel was consecrated in ad 32, even though only the northern part of the temple with its chapel was definitely constructed by that time. The archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicate that it was considered the sanctuary of all the Palmyrenes, regardless of tribe. It was the largest of the city's sanctuaries, its square enclosure measuring 200 × 200 m, and the temple combined local traditions and needs with Greek architectural motifs. The temple has one row of Corinthian columns around it and space for a second row that was never constructed (*pseudodipteros*), but the entrance is on the west long side. The narrow sides had pediments but the roof of the long sides was decorated with a continuous pattern of crow-steps. Another peculiarity is the presence of a doorway behind the columns of the entrance. In the interior, the temple had two separate chapels on the narrow north and south sides that had been constructed at different points in time. The ceiling of the north one was covered with a relief depicting the planets encircled by the zodiac, and of the south by a relief with floral and geometric patterns. The beams of the peristyle were carved with scenes that refer to either cult events or practices. The enclosure of the sanctuary of Allat was enlarged and colonnades were added, with inscriptions indicating that the works were privately sponsored and took place over the course of several decades. The benefactors of the shrine were honored with inscribed columns, at least one of which also carried the figure of the patron. The famous, monumental lion was also set up in the sanctuary in this period (for the sanctuary of Bel, see Kaizer 2002, 67–79; Gawlikowski 2019, 81; for the shrine of Allat, see Kaizer 2002, 99–108; Gawlikowski 2017). Two more sanctuaries were added to the cityscape: that of Nabu, its earliest phases dating from the second half of the first century ad (Kaizer 2002, 89–91; Gawlikowski 2019, 81), and that of Arsu (Kaizer 2002, 116–121; Gawlikowski 2019, 81). The temple of Nabu was sponsored by two families and, like the temple of Bel combined Graeco-Roman (such as the axiality of the layout, the raised base, the peristyle, and the Tuscan order columns) and Syrian features (the chapel and a flat roof with crow-steps) (Gawlikowski 2021, 145–149). There are only few remains of the temple of Arsu, mainly the foundations and part of the cella; however,

a "hoard" of 125 banqueting tesserae offers valuable insight into the practice of ritual banquets in Palmyra (Kaizer 2002, 116; Raja 2015a; 2015b; 2016; 2019b; Gawlikowski 2021, 92, 186). In contrast to the intense construction activities in the funerary and religious sphere, of the public buildings, only the Agora was built at the end of the century (Gawlikowski 2019). Following the Greek model, it is a rectangular square with a portico formed of eighty columns on the sides and three monumental gates (Delplace and Dentzer-Feydy 2005).

From near the middle of the first century ad are the first precisely dated sculptural monuments that have survived. The first is a relief over the foundation inscription of the tower tomb of Kitôt from ad 41 (fig. 35.1), and the second, a votive stele in honor of the god Shadrafa, dated in ad 55.

FIGURE 35.1. The banqueting relief from the tower tomb of Kitôt, dated **AD** 41.
Tower tomb of Kitôt, now destroyed. Photo courtesy of Agnes Henning.

Dated votive and funerary reliefs and altars are of primary importance for constructing the chronological phases and changes of Palmyrene art, since many of the antiquities from the site were either removed from their original context because of their desirability (this is especially true of heads, that found their way into multiple museums in Europe and the United States), or come from buildings whose chronology cannot be connected to a dated inscription. The analysis of these objects shows that it is possible to distinguish specific traits in the art of this period: men and women are shown with large eyes, and details such as eyebrows, irises, and pupils that are incised. The men appear beardless and the women carry spindles and distaffs while they wear plain or simply decorated headbands. Priests with their characteristic cylindrical, flat-top headdress, also appear in the art of the city from this period. They belonged to the upper strata of society, their priesthoods were most likely hereditary, and the basic elements of their iconography appear unchanged in the art of these almost three centuries (see Raja 2016b; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; 2018). At the same time, the banqueting motif, which will dominate the funerary art of Palmyra until the fall of the city to the Romans, appears on the relief from the tomb of Kitôt; highlighting the innovation and experimentation with the type is the fact that the wife of Kitôt is shown standing rather than seated, as will be the norm from then on (for the chronological development of Palmyrene art, see Ingholt 1928, who established the criteria for its stylistic development; and Raja, Bobou, and Romanowska 2021 for the refining and redefining of them, with previous bibliography).

Palmyra, AD 100–160

For Palmyra, the first half of the second century AD is a period of great economic growth but also of importance on the military and political stage of the Roman Empire. While it has been proposed that a unit of Palmyrene archers had fought under Vespasian in the Jewish–Roman War (Southern 2008, 25), the first auxiliary unit of Palmyrene camel riders (Ala I Ulpia dromedariorum Palmyrenorum) was established during the reign of Trajan (r. AD 98–117), and the contribution of Palmyrene archers in the Dacian War is most likely commemorated on the Trajan's Column (Hannestad 1988, 160). The significance of the city is further documented by the fact that Hadrian (r. 117–138) visited Palmyra in AD 129/130 (Smith II 2013, 25–26). The military prowess of the Palmyrenes was one of the factors that contributed to the success of Palmyrene trade enterprises; the honorific inscriptions for caravan leaders and patrons set up in the city indicate that, even during the *pax romana*, it was necessary to use force to protect their goods and people (Yon 2019).

The accumulated wealth of its elites is manifested mainly through the funerary monuments and portraits (Gawlikowski 1970; Henning 2013; 2019; Raja 2022). The first large, underground family tombs (hypogea) appeared near the middle of the second century ad; the tower tombs continued to be in use, but underground tombs offered the possibility of the limitless expansion of the family tomb as all one needed to do is cut into the soft bedrock for the creation of chambers and niches for burials. Their plan is usually T-shaped, with additional wings or square chambers cut into the rock to serve the needs of the family during the tomb's period of use. Most common is the placement of the burial of tomb's founder right across the entrance. Temple or house tombs also appear in the same period, with the earliest founded in ad 143. These are overground tombs, built like small temples with elaborate façades and, in the

interior, the burials arranged around a central courtyard, with or without columns supporting the roof, like a house. The temple/house tombs seem to have been restricted to the city's highest elite. In addition to burials in loculus niches, a new form of burial appears in this period that allowed for the display of the family unit within the extended family tomb: that of the sarcophagus. Together with sarcophagi proper, reliefs imitating the front of sarcophagi also make their first appearance. Palmyrene sarcophagi form a distinct group: made of limestone, they almost always emphasize the family unity and its wealth: on the lid, a banquet scene offered the opportunity for the family members to be shown in all their finery, usually in clothes inspired by Parthian fashions, while the box had small portrait busts of other family members from the same generation as the ones on the lid and their ancestors (on the Palmyrene sarcophagi, see Bobou and Raja 2023). On individual portraits, men appear with beards for the first time, while the women appear wearing more types of jewels (for a complete survey of the representational changes in Palmyrene portraits, see Raja, Bobou, and Romanowska 2021).

In the religious sphere, one sees the Palmyrene wealth on display in the city's sanctuaries: works continued in the sanctuary of Bel (Kaizer 2002, 67–69) and of Nabu (Kaizer 2002, 89–91; for the sanctuary, see Bounni 2004), while the sanctuary of Allat was enlarged (Gawlikowski 2017, 28), and a new temple was added at the sanctuary of Baalshamin (see Collart and Vicari 1969 for the sanctuary). The city's public spaces were also transformed with the building of the Great Colonnade, a project that started around the time of Hadrian's visit and continued until the fall of the city to Aurelian's forces in 27. A peculiarity of the Palmyrene colonnade, seen only in a few other cities of the Roman East, was that each column had a bracket projecting out of the column shaft, on which usually bronze, less often marble, honorific statues were placed. The layout of the colonnade also took into account pre-existing buildings, such as the temple of Nabu, and so is irregular. A long building was also constructed next to the agora. This may have been a basilica, and together with an already existing building that has been identified as the Council Hall and was probably built in the first phase of the agora, it gave the complex a more Roman character (Gawlikowski 2019, 83; 2021, 95–105).

Palmyra, AD 160–200

The archaeological evidence shows that the period between AD 160 and 175 was one of economic recession: in the city, works were mainly continued, both in the sanctuaries and the Great Colonnade, however, there is no evidence of any major structure being founded in this period. In the funerary sphere, only two new tombs were constructed, while parts of existing tombs began being sold off. The practice of selling sections of tombs, mainly underground ones, gives insight into the economic fortunes of the city, but also into social and legal practices otherwise unattested for Palmyra. Thanks to these cession texts, it is known that women were able to have property of their own that they could sell or buy (Cussini 2005; 2012). Fewer funerary portraits date to this period as well. This evidence indicates that two major events of the second half of the second century AD, probably affected also Palmyra: the first is the campaign of Lucius Verus against the Parthians, and the second, the Antonine Plague, brought to the Roman Empire by the returning army (Raja, Romanowska, Bobou 2021). The later part of the second century AD, as well as the beginning of the third century AD is a period of economic recovery, but also of changes. The theater was probably built around AD 200, new porticoes were built in the city, while the Great Colonnade continued to be expanded. Furthermore, alongside the earlier tombs that remained in use, thirteen new tombs were founded in this period, while the number of funerary portraits was increased (Bobou, Raja, Rom

anowska 2021, 160–161). The inscriptions on the bases of statues honoring caravan leaders of the period, however, indicate that the route taken by the Palmyrenes probably changed in the early third century AD: a decree dating to AD 211 is the last one recording a trip along the Euphrates route; after that, caravan leaders used the Egypt and the Red Sea route instead (Hartmann 2001, 78; Schörle 2017; Seland 2019, 130–133).

Palmyra, AD 220–273

The period between AD 220 and 240 is characterized by the flowering of Palmyrene funerary portrait sculpture, and the almost complete lack of building activities in the civic and religious spheres. The sculptors and patrons in Palmyra delighted in showing off elaborate details of costume and jewelry in their portraits, both in loculus reliefs and sarcophagi, and some of the most ornamented monuments date from this period. One such object is the so-called Beauty of Palmyra; with her abundance of necklaces, head jewelry, bracelets, and rings, she stands out among the other Palmyrene reliefs (fig. 35.2). When she was discovered, she had ample traces of color that allowed researchers to reconstruct the original polychromy of the sculpture (Inghol t 1930, 341, 343, fig. 4; Ploug 1995, 188–192, cat. no. 77; Raja and Sørensen 2015; Krag 2018, 323, cat. no. 587; Raja 2019a, 198–201, cat. no. 57 with previous bibliography; on the polychromy and its reconstruction: Buccarella Hedegaard and Brøns 2019).

FIGURE 35.2. "The Beauty of Palmyra."
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. no. IN 2795. Image © Anders Sune Berg / Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

While the erection of honorific statues continues, the decrees do not mention the reasons behind the dedications. One possible explanation may be that all the essential public and religious buildings were in place; however, some of them had been left unfinished by the time the city fell to the Romans. It is more likely that, unlike tombs and burials that were both a necessity and a public display of piety and familial sentiment, the wealth of the elite was diverted into activities that have left little or no trace in the archaeological record. The overthrow of the Arsacid dynasty in ad 224 by Ardashir I and the expansion of the Sasanians probably necessitated increased expenditure on military training, equipment, and operations. This, however, is only implicitly attested in the sources relating to the period between ad 240 and 273, when Odainat, who was one of the rare members of the senatorial class in Palmyra (the other documented senator being Haddudan: Gawlikowski 2021, 83; Raja 2022, 119), proved himself a capable general, scoring victories against the Sasanians and earning the titles "*corrector* of the East" and "Lord of the City." Odainat's successes were surely the result of considerable spending on the army.

Despite most of Palmyra's wealth being funneled into military operations, there are still tombs and objects that can be dated to this period. One of the most elaborate—and strange—monuments of this period is a sarcophagus that was found in a tomb incorporated into the wall built by Diocletian at the end of the third century ad. On the lid, it shows a richly dressed man reclining, but next to him, instead of his wife, is his horse, standing proud with all its trappings (fig. 35.3).

FIGURE 35.3. Sarcophagus with reclining man and horse on the lid, **AD** 240–273.
Palmyra Museum. Photo courtesy of Michał Gawlikowski.

On the box, there is a sacrifice scene at the front, a woman with an attendant on the left side, and, on the right side, a female, most likely a goddess with a camel. The sarcophagus exemplifies the considerable familiarity of the Palmyrenes with trends in the funerary monuments of the Roman Empire, and yet, at the same time, they did not copy them: the sacrifice scene is found as one of the moments commemorated in the so-called biographical sarcophagi, yet here it occupies the entire long side of the sarcophagus. The iconography on the right side is also without any parallels in Palmyra or elsewhere. The sculpture of the horse, however, is the element that shows that, in the end, it was the patrons who decided exactly what they wanted to have on the monuments commemorating themselves (if the monument had been commissioned during their lifetime, as has been suggested for Roman sarcophagi) or their loved ones (Parlasca 1998, 313; Schmidt-Colinet 2004, 193–194; Sommer 2005, 199–200; Schmidt-Colinet and al-As'ad 2007, 271–276; Schmidt-Colinet 2009, 223–227; Wielgosz-Rondolino 2016, 77–78; Curtis 2017, 63–64; Krag 2018, 396, cat. no. 854; Sommer 2018, 175). Another tomb that, although probably built in the 220s continued to be used in this period is temple tomb no. 36. It is one of the very few tombs that has been published in detail: it has

alternating pediments and arches on the columns of its façade, a flat roof with step-crow decoration, and one of the largest concentrations of sculptures from a single tomb in Palmyra. The excavators have associated it with the family of Worod, Odainat's advisor (on the tomb, see Schmidt-Colinet 1992; on the *argapet* Worod, see recently Andrade 2022, 48–49; Daryaee 2022). Another important, monumental tomb of this period is tomb no. 86, that has been associated with Odainat himself, since it was the largest of all the temple/house tombs of Palmyra and located at one of the most prominent locations of the city (Andrade 2018; 2019; for the inscription from the family tomb of Odainat, found reused in the medieval fortress of Palmyra, see Yon 2012, 410–411, cat. no. 545).

Odainat's successes in the field also made him a dangerous man to some; the emperor Gallienus, a family member, and even his wife Zenobia have been considered to be behind his assassination in ad 267/268 (Gawlikowski 2021, 71–72; for Zenobia, see Andrade 2018). Odainat's death left his widow in control of Palmyra. Zenobia, acting as regent for her son Wahballat, expanded the Palmyrene territory to modern-day Ankara and Egypt, thus creating an empire. More than anything else, however, it was the appellation of her son as king and of herself as queen in ad 270 and their campaigns against Egypt and Galatia, that forced the Roman emperor Aurelian (r. 270–275) to attack Palmyra. His forces took the city in ad 272, and again, after a second revolt of the Palmyrene noblemen, in ad 273. After the sack by the Roman forces, Palmyra lost its privileges, its autonomy, and its importance on the international stage and became the base of a Roman garrison. The settlement continued to thrive in the next few centuries, but lost its importance again and diminished greatly by the seventeenth century (for Palmyra after Zenobia, see Intagliata 2018; 2019; 2022). By the eighteenth century, it was a small village with picturesque ruins and desirable antiquities that attracted European travelers and antiquarians (Sartre-Fauriat 2019; for Palmyra in post-Ottoman and modern Syria, see Raja 2022).

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CHAPTER 36

HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN ḤAURĀN

A Well-Connected Near Eastern Region with a Local Style

ANNA-KATHARINA RIEGER

The Ḥaurān—Black, Desertic, and Fertile

Ḥaurān, in Arabic حوران, is a volcanic area in southern Syria and northeastern Jordan between the Golan Heights and the Yarmouk basin to the west, and the Arabian Desert to the east (Ḥarra). The name derives from the Semitic-Greek word *Hauranitis* (חַוְרָן, e.g., Ezekiel 47:16; Αυρανιτις, e.g., Ios., *Ant. Iud.* 14.10). With the Jebel el-Arab (*Mons Alsadamus*), reaching ca. 1,800 m a.s.l., the fertile plain of Nuqrah and the Golan Heights, and the desertic Leja three different ecological habitats characterize the region. They correspond roughly to the ancient subdivision of today's Ḥaurān: *Hauranitis* (Jebel el-Arab), *Gaulanitis* (Golan), *Batanaea* (Nuqrah), and *Trachonitis* (Leja) (Alpass 2013, 167; Engels 2007, Abb. 1).

The Leja and the zones of the Arabian Desert can only be used for grazing in the more humid winter times, whereas in all other landscape entities the fertile volcanic soils allowed for agricultural production and livestock breeding (Braemer 2011). Since the Bronze Age, inhabitants have adapted their livelihood to this environment (Seland, chapter 4, this volume). Settlements, tombs, and water harvesting installations to enhance the scarce water resources date back to the third millennium BC—for example, at Jawa, Khirbet Umbashi, or Jebel Qurma (Braemer et al. 2009; Braemer 2011; Akkermans, Huigens, and Brüning 2014; Müller-Neuhof 2 014; Rohmer 2020).

Cereals and legumes, but also tree cultures such as figs were the main products in Graeco-Roman times (Villeneuve 1985; Willcox 2003; see fig. 8 of Bouchaud 2012). They were complemented by grapes, that allowed for wine production in Ḥaurān in late antiquity (Zerbini 2013), comparable to the developments in the Negev in this time. Ḥaurān offered considerable economic potential for its inhabitants.

The Historical Agents—Questioning Narratives

In the Hellenistic and Roman period, the agents in Ḥaurān were Nabataeans, Ituraeans, and Hasmoneans, while the powers from outside such as the Ptolemies and Seleucids did not establish deeply rooted control in Ḥaurān (see Raja, chapter 1, this volume; Gentelle 1985). In 64 BC the Roman authorities annexed Syria and established the Hasmoneans as client kings, who possessed parts of Ḥaurān (and Nabataea) between 64 BC and AD 106. In this year the Nabataean kingdom was incorporated into the Roman Empire as the province of Arabia Petraea (Sartre 2005, 5–131; Millar 1993, 27–99; see Schmid and Fiema, chapter 50, this volume) with Bostra as its capital.

The Evidence and Inscriptions

Nabataean influence is documented in southern Ḥaurān (Umm el-Jimal, Bostra) from the first century BC through pottery, coinage, and architectural style, reaching as far north as the sanctuary of Seeia/Sîʿ on the western slopes of the Jebel el-Arab (Tholbecq 2007; Alpass 2013, 170–199), whereas the so-called Nabataean inscriptions are now thought to be written in a local Aramaic script (Nehmé 2010, with figs. 2–4). The influence of the Hasmoneans in the western parts of Ḥaurān is also archaeologically recognizable and includes statuary and epigraphy (see Lichtenberger ch. 5; Hoover ch. 6; Bobou and Raja ch. 7; MacGinnis, chapter 12, this volume; Weber 2009; Regev 2013). The Ituraeans living in the northwestern parts are better known from Hellenistic and Roman written sources than from their material culture (Hoffmann-Salz 2021). Moreover, the people using an Ancient North Arabian script (ANA), the so-called Safaitic, played a role in the region but are not a socio-cultural group (Macdonald 1993, fig. 2; 2003; 2014) (fig. 36.1). Greek and Aramaic were widely written and spoken; Latin was used only by Roman officials and veterans (see Speidel, chapter 16, this volume). The distribution of scripts and alphabets as well as personal and communal interrelations prove that the ways of living between the jebel, the ḥarra, and the plain cannot be distinguished ethnically or linguistically but rather according to the socio-economic practices determined by the availability of resources. Presumably, many people could choose scripts contextually according to a more mobile or a more sedentary way of living.

FIGURE 36.1. Inscriptions in Ancient North Arabian script (so-called Safaitic) and Greek at Zalaf in the Ḥarra (OCIANA WR.C 1-13) (http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/images/fullsize/im0096854.jpg).

Subscribing to multiple identities and still developing a typical, regional—in this case Haurānite—style, was common in regions of the Graeco-Roman Near East (Versluys 2008; Cott

on 2009). However, the narratives of nomadic topoi—marauding Ituraeans, trading Nabataeans, herders using the so-called Safaitic, as opposed to well-organized Romans still dominate the interpretative patterns. But the rarely questioned dichotomy of the "desert and the sown" (e.g., Dentzer 1986, 405–406; Stoll 2015; Engels 2007) can only be overcome by acknowledging recent shifts in the historical interpretations of mobile life-strategies (e.g., Rosen 2008; see Avni and Rosen, chapter 27, this volume), and by scrutinizing material evidence first as a local phenomenon. Yet, all these agents reflected in scripts, material evidence, or written sources suffer the fate in archaeological research of being split today between three nations and instrumentalized for religions.

The Scholarly Interests in and Euro-centric Views on Ḥaurān

Scholarly interest motivated early travelers in western Asia in the nineteenth century such as Ulrich Jasper Seetzen or Johann Ludwig Burkhardt, followed by Melchior de Vogüé, to visit Ḥaurān and document mainly the architecture, or as with William Henry Waddington, the inscriptions. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Howard Crosby Butler undertook surveys in Ḥaurān with a team of architects and epigraphists. Their publications still represent one of the most comprehensive compilations of Ḥaurān's antiquities (Butler 1913–1919). Despite their merits, their aesthetically appealing reconstructions often lack an archaeological basis, and have distorted interpretations for decades.

The fascination of Ḥaurān was a result of the good preservation of Graeco-Roman remains. Main features of the architectural structures as well as settlement layouts remained untouched (e.g., Bostra, Dentzer, Blanc, and Fournet 2002). Temple buildings, baths, or houses in the settlements remained standing up to the roof, since the Druzes who moved to Ḥaurān in the eighteenth/nineteenth century repurposed the existing architectural spaces as houses, stables, or mosques (fig. 36.2). Also, the Roman infrastructure of roads and bridges is still recognizable in the landscape, e.g., at Jmarrin or Nimreh (Kissel and Stoll 2000). Thousands of Aramaic, Greek, and Latin inscriptions are preserved (Littmann 1904; 1913; *IGLS*, vols. XIII–XVI), not to mention the ten of thousands ANA-graffiti,[1] attracting the greatest scholarly interest alongside the sculptures and temples. Research on settlement archaeology, agricultural production, and pottery gained momentum from the 1980s, when French and German scholars started work in Ḥaurān (Hauran I; Orssaud 1986; Henrich 2002; Weber 2009; Dentzer et al. 2010; Renel 2010; Freyberger et al. 2015; Dentzer and Weber 2017).

FIGURE 36.2. Bostra from the air in 1932(?). View from north, where the Roman camp was located, towards the theater and the large birkeh (water reservoir), The Hellenistic and Roman city is covered by the modern settlement (Library of Congress: American Colony (Jerusalem), Photo Department, LC-DIG-matpc-15960).

The particularities of the Graeco-Roman Ḥaurān were often explained as retardism or rusticism (Kropp 2010, 2; Meynersen 2004, 134; Johns 2003; Versluys 2008, esp. 353–354), resulting from its supposedly marginal position. Even though Ḥaurān is located at the margins of the Roman western Asian provinces, it has a central position between the Arabian and the Syrian Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, that does not entail seclusion or backwardness.

Living in Ḥaurān

Building on postcolonial perspectives, which were influential when the Ḥaurān became the focus of archaeological studies, approaches can be broadened by a focus on micro-historical settings, embedding them into the larger network of political, cultural, and economic relations (Horden and Purcell 2001; Jiménez 2016; Poblome, Gerçeker, and Loopmans 2017). The settlement pattern, cultural and economic production, the overlap of different life-strategies, the senses of belonging and identity construction, and its position on the border of the Roman Empire make Ḥaurān a region of diversity and at the same time homogeneity (see Raja ch. 1; Versluys, chapter 3, this volume).

Regional interrelations and Local Settlement Patterns

Routes

The interrelations of Ḥaurān were established through ancient Near Eastern routes that crossed the region: the King's Highway ran west of the Jebel el-Arab connecting the Red Sea ports with Damascus via Bostra. In the second century AD it was renamed the Via Traiana Nova with a slightly varying course. The late Roman Strata Diocletiana crossed Ḥaurān either east of the Jebel el-Arab from Azraq via Sa'ane and Dmeir northward or west of the jebel (Kissel and Stoll 2000). East–west routes crossed the Ḥarra from Zalaf to Damascus or from Subeyqeh to Jawa; from Bostra a road led to Adraa/Dar'a, and further to the Decapolis and Lake Tiberias. A northward leg via Aere/es-Sanamein connected Haurān to the Golan Heights and Mount Hermon (Bauzou 1985; see Pažout, chapter 17, this volume).[2]

These routes were used by caravans to transport agricultural products and other commodities from or through Ḥaurān, as well as by military units employed in the safety of the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire (Kennedy 1996; Butcher 2003, 399–404; Sartre 2005, 220–223; Stoll 2015). Hence, Ḥaurān was an open, well-connected region, while at the same time retaining its own character (Versluys 2014 with responses; Jiménez 2016).

Communities

In contrast to the connectivity of Ḥaurān to the wider region, its administrative organization differs from for example the Hellenistic models in the Decapolis or the Greek cities to the north (Dentzer et al. 2010). Only Kanatha is referred to as a *polis* of the Hellenistic Decapolis (Rohmer 2020). The settlement pattern of Ḥaurān is rather comparable to Mount Hermon or the Dead Cities in the northern Syria, where small settlements with extremely short distances, of around 1.5 to 5 km, between them prevail (Urman 1985; see Blömer, chapter 38, this volume). This pattern does not change from Hellenistic to late Roman and Umayyad times.

The controversial discussion about territories or the absence of cities in Ḥaurān falls short since it looks for Hellenistic-Roman schemes of hierarchically organized (city-)centers with peripheries (Sartre 1981; Versluys 2008). A more aereal perspective allows us to better understand "anomalities" of the Ḥaurān (Rieger 2017; 2019). This is not to say that Bostra was not a center because of its function as provincial capital, its position on the Via Traiana Nova, and its facilities such as a temple for the emperor's cult (*IGLS* XIII.1, 9143); or deny that Soada/Suweida received the status of a *polis* in the second century ad for being a hub on the western slopes of the jebel, and differed in size and facilities from villages, such as Seleima, for example. Yet, in the organization of settlements, land use, and cohabitation in Ḥaurān all individual settlements, especially from the second to the fourth century ad, are highly interrelated. They are—as Sartre (2005, 231, referring to Gatier) puts it: "powerful collective structures marked by autonomous village institutions." These *komai* are the backbone of Ḥaurān throughout history. They have officials with various tasks (*ekdikoi*: Littmann 1922, no. 659 [Hebran]; *bouleutes*: *IGR* I, 25 [Kanatha]; *IGLS* XIII.2, 9815 [Deir Umm el-Walad]; *episkopoi*: *IGR* III, 1316 [Salkhad]; *IGLS* XIII.1, 9112 [Bostra]; *epimeletes*: *IGR* III, 1009 [Kafr Nebo]). This communal organization cannot be seen as a preliminary stage to be developed ("proto-communities," Zerbini 2013, 117), but as a fully fledged structure for the communities' complex life (MacLean 1928; Sartre 1993).

Metrokomiai—larger villages—become more frequent in the *Trachonitis* and *Batanaea* from the third century ad onward (e.g., Phaena: Waddington 2524; Zorava: *IGLS* XV.1, 191; Borechath: *IGLS* XVI.1, 28; MacAdam 1983; Millar 1993; Sartre 1999). They might have their

origin in the estates of the Roman emperor (Sartre 2005, 231—*contra* Zerbini 2013, 62; Butcher 2003, 160). Even though the reason remains unclear, *metrokomiai* represent a unique form of socio-spatial organization in Ḥaurān.

This pattern of numerous, scattered, rather small-sized settlements in a decentralized mesh of interdependencies shapes and is shaped by the utilization and exploitation of the resources in Ḥaurān to enhance living conditions: the settlements were highly intertwined in order to balance, for example, the scarcity of water in the Nuqrah Plain and the Leja, which come from the jebel (Rieger 2017).

People and Hauranite Style

The local residents of Ḥaurān, who left inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic, as well as in ANA, gave their affiliations to communities and places: the *koina* of a village, or the *komai* are mentioned from the first century AD onward (e.g., Aphetata/el-Afineh, Arra/Rahâ, and Orsua/Rsas, *IGR* III, 1276; Waddington 1870, 2308; Seeia: Waddington 1870, 2367; es-Sanamein: Littmann 1922, no. 655). "People of Ḥaurān" appears in a graffito from Jordan,[3] but also in a Greek-Aramaic inscription from Seeia (Macdonald 1995; Littmann 1913, no. 103). Local communities are recorded as "the people of Sf" (Sha'af) or "of Ṣlḫd" (Salkhad) (Macdonald 1993, 348–349).[4] These people felt at home in two (or more) cultural backgrounds which becomes clear through a number of bilingual inscriptions written by the same individuals (Macdonald et al. 1996, 480–484).[5] Personal and institutional interrelations between the communities also occur: *bouleutês* hold office across villages, as for example at Atheila/Atil and Kanatha/Qanawat (*IGR* I, 25); a *bouleutês* from Kanatha/Qanawat set up an altar to Athena in the precinct of Mushennef (Waddington 1870, 2216); two villages organized a communal religious festival (Kanatha/Qanawat and Soada/Suweida, Waddington 1870, 2307 and 2370).

Such relations can also be seen in architectural styles, ornaments, sculpture, or epigraphic habits of the Ḥaurān (Freyberger et al. 2015). Yet, even though there is a relation between changes in style and socio-political shifts ("pre-provincial" and "provincial" style; Hauran I; Dentzer 2003) and general Roman trends in funerary images, new types of buildings, or construction techniques are manifest in Ḥaurānite material culture (Sartre-Fauriat 2001; Dentzer et al. 2010; Clauss-Balty 2008a), the local style remains recognizable (Versluys 2017, 166–167).

Living a Farm Life

The landscape is scattered with field systems, and houses and farmsteads often possess facilities such as a courtyard for the processing of agricultural products, stables with fixed troughs, or animal pens (Bopp 2006; Clauss-Balty 2008b; el-Halabi 2012; Hatoum 2012; cf. Littmann 1922, no. 696 *boustasion*). Hence, most of the people in Ḥaurān lived a rural life based on the crops from fields and gardens, or on livestock breeding.

The rural settlements experienced growth in the second century ad, backed by the intensification of agricultural exploitation under Roman rule, and continued into Umayyad times and often appear as clustered habitations. Whereas small houses do not follow standardized plans and range from two to four rooms (Hatoum 2012; Clauss-Balty 2008b), those in unobstructed spaces are more clearly structured, often large with representational rooms and up to three stories high; façades appear closed; in Roman times, sometimes porticoes are set in front of the façades. In this period, arches and vaults replaced the typical corbelled ceilings of earlier periods ("salle à alcoves," Villeneuve 1997; Clauss-Balty 2008b, 57–78). Towers could accompany the habitations (Gilento 2015; Vallat and Leblanc 2008). Typical for houses in

Ḥaurān as well as Golan are features such as "window walls" to enhance air circulation. Constructions for housing are—as all architecture in Ḥaurān—entirely made from basalt. Beams, walls, columns, or thresholds of the houses, stables, but also temples and tombs are made from the hard blackish to greyish stone. Since it is a hard material, working it was a labor-intensive undertaking. However, also all elements of decoration, in houses for example above the doors, or on the face of a beam, as well as friezes and capitals of public buildings were sculptured from basalt (Dentzer-Feydy 1986; 2008).

Closely related to the types of habitations is the organization of the properties. The scattered villages offer short-distance access to fields that were often enclosed by field stone walls. Only in the area around Soada/Suweida and Bostra Roman can centuriation be traced in the landscape, whereas in general the old system remained in use (Villeneuve 1985; Vallat and Leblanc 2008; Hatoum 2012) (fig. 36.2). Large estates throughout Graeco-Roman times can be reconstructed e.g., for the Nuqra Plain as well as in the north-east close to Maximianopolis/Shaqqa (Sartre 1981; Clauss-Balty 2008b, 44).

Living to Best Standards

New facilities in the settlements appear in the second and third centuries AD, when baths and nymphaea were built. As in other cities of Greater Syria as well as the Roman world, this resulted from a homogenization of styles and their material expressions (Versluys 2014; 2017, 185–189 for Hellenistic times). Thermal buildings were in use, e.g., at Philippopolis/Shahba, Bostra, and Seleima (Fournet 2012); nymphaea embellished the streets at Soada/Suweida and Bostra, whereas Kanatha/Qanawat built a free-standing nymphaeum in the wadi (Sartre-Fauriat 1992; Breitner 2010). Yet, not all realms of public life changed with the Roman administration: the fashion for setting up honorary statues did not find its ways to the Ḥaurānite settlements, and the emperor's cult is only attested at Bostra and Philippopolis/Shahba.

Shahba was the birthplace of the emperor Philippus Arabs and refounded as a *colonia* at the beginning of the third century ad (see Aliquot, chapter 15, this volume) with a well-known set of urbanistic features: a colonnaded street, theater, baths with high-quality mosaics, and a stadion (Balty 1991; Darrous and Rohmer 2004; Fournet 2012; Oenbrink 2006). Outstanding are the so-called Philippeion and the Forum with a large exedra-building (Amer and Gawlikowski 1985; Freyberger 2010–2011, Abb. 33) (fig. 36.3)—one of the few buildings explicitly for the emperor cult in Ḥaurān, where also the only imperial portraiture—obviously Philippus Arabs—was found (Maschek 2010). This ambitious planned city was never finished.

FIGURE 36.3. Exedra at Philippopolis/Shahba (Ross Burns, 2010, https://monumentsofsyria.com/wp/wp-content/gallery/shahba/shahba-kalybe-2893.jpg).

Protecting and Integrating Ḥaurān

Fortlets, Soldiers, and Veterans

Defense, protection, and demarcation were apparently not a high priority in Graeco-Roman Ḥaurān, even though the Roman eastern frontier running east of the Jebel el-Arab was not easy to defend in the third to sixth centuries AD (Millar 1993, 127–173; Sartre-Fauriat 2016; see Edwell ch. 22; Clarke ch. 30; Gregoratti, chapter 33, this volume). With the establishment of the Roman province of Syria in 64 BC, and of Arabia Petraea in AD 106 defensive works were constructed—the further east the less formalized they were, in comparison to the well-structured installations along the Via Traiana or the later Strata Diocletiana to the north or south (see Speidel, chapter 16, this volume).

Apart from some fortified hilltop settlements dating back to Bronze Age times (Labwe, Khirbet Umbashi, Braemer 2011; Bostra, Soada/Suweida, Rohmer 2020; Dentzer et al. 2010, 150–155), only Bostra and Umm el-Jimal were protected by walls in Roman and Byzantine times (de Vries and Betlyon 1998; Dentzer, Blanc, and Fournet 2002). At Bostra the Legio III Cyrenaica was stationed in the *castrum* north of the city (Waddington 1870, 1945; *IGLS* XIII.1, 9050; Dentzer-Feydy et al. 2007). Other legions occur in the epigraphic evidence when soldiers were reallocated, as, for example, a soldier of the Legio III Gallica, who dedicated at Aera/es-Sanamein in the second century ad (Waddington 1870, 2413f); at Umm el-Jimal soldiers were

stationed in the third to fifth centuries ad (de Vries and Betlyon 1998, ch. 6 and 7). The veterans, some of them from the region itself, appear in inscriptions as men who commissioned tombs, buildings, and dedications to the gods (*IGLS* XIII.1, 9112; Waddington 1870, 2225. 2331 b; *IGR* III, 1219; Stoll 2015, 143–148).

Places in the Ḥarra—Inbetween and Reaching out

Even though many *koina* of the settlements erected walls, towers, and ramparts in the third or fourth century AD (e.g., Adraha *IGLS* XIV, 10; 14–16; 18, 19; Orman: *IGLS* XVI.2, 1065; 1066; Salkhad: *IGLS* XVI.2, 1118), not all served military purposes; some were also for the "security of travellers" (Selaima: *IGLS* XVI.1, 75).

In this situation small outposts also appeared useful and were established deliberately (e.g., Teima: *IGLS* XVI.1, 708; Namara, Deir el-Nasrani and Sa'aneh: Macdonald 2008; Sartre 2016; ad-Diyatheh: Villeneuve 1986). Yet, they had more than a military function: at Namara, the small fortlet close to field systems and cisterns seems to control the grazing area and water supply points rather than protect access to the Jebel el-Arab. Such places in scarcely populated areas located at the desert fringe have an ambiguous character serving as meeting points rather than for defense, as the inscriptions with mixed Greek, Aramaic, and Ancient North Arabic demonstrate (fig. 36.1): an ANA-inscription speaks about one who camped in this place close to a permanent source of water.[6]

Also, the provincial borders between Arabia Petraea and Syria were not clear-cut and shifted according to needs. The water supply of Bostra, the capital of Arabia Petraea, for example, crossed provincial borders, since it received water from the Jebel to the northeast, which belonged to the province of Syria (Rieger 2017).

The interlinkages in the larger region can also be traced in the pottery used in Haurān in Graeco-Roman times, which shows close relations to neighboring areas. At Bostra, the inhabitants used pottery from the Decapolis (Gerasa) in Roman times (Blanc 2007); places in the Ledja, such as the village and sanctuary at Sahr el-Leja, received ceramic vessels from the Golan and Galilee in the third/fourth century ad (Hartal, Hudson, and Berlin 2008; Renel 2017; Dentzer and Weber 2017, 370).

Imports of African pottery, a common good in many areas of the Roman Empire from the third to the fifth centuries ad, are rare (Munzi and Ciotola 2006); imports of the late Hellenistic/early Roman period from the eastern Mediterranean wares are documented at Massakeb (Kalos 1999), at Bostra and Soada/Suweida (Blanc 2007), as well as at Sahr el-Leja (Renel 2017), but not in high quantities. Locally produced pottery was identified at Bostra, Seeia/Sī', and Kanatha/Qanawat from the late first century bc to the seventh century ad (Orssaud 1986; Henrich 2002; Orssaud, Barret, and Blanc 2003; Blanc 2007), for which an inner Hauranite exchange can be traced (Wilson and Sa'ad 1984). This material still awaits comparative analysis of techniques and distribution.

Representing Humans and Worshipping Deities

In Graeco-Roman times Ḥaurānites commissioned numerous sculptures. Deities—many Nikes, animals, men at work and as scribes, funerary portraits, peopled scrolls, some scenic depictions are among the motifs used in Ḥaurān (Bolelli 1986; Laxander 2000; Meynersen 2004; Isaac 2008; Rieger in print). Characteristic is the geometric treatment of volumes, the graphical treatment of surfaces and a certain frontality of the images. Yet, they did not partake in the marble trade of the Mediterranean in Roman times and preferred the local black basalt

(exceptions e.g., Weber 2006, cat. nos. 1 and 2). In this Ḥaurān—like the northwestern provinces of the Roman Empire, where sculpture from stone were not at all of interest (Stewart 2010)—differs from the Mediterranean *koinè*.

Humans, Animals, and Artisans

Depictions of individuals—portraits—appear frequently in funerary contexts, whereas the few honorific statues are only preserved in fragments or epigraphy. Members of an elite family, Malikat and Obodas, appear as donors at the sanctuary at Seeia at the end of the first century BC as well as in honorific statues next to one of King Herodes (Tholbecq 2007). At Sahr el-Ledja honorific statues of notables are preserved close to deities on chariots, accompanied by riders set up frontally on a large base. Drawing on Hellenistic as well as Near Eastern models (Weber et al. 2009; Dentzer and Weber 2017), this motif, which is recurring in Ḥaurān, is attested at more than thirty places and reflects an inner-Ḥaurānite cohesion. A comparable group was found in the sanctuary at Shabwa in Yemen (Breton 2013), which represent a link far beyond the limits of Ḥaurān (Rieger in print).

Sheep and goats, as the most important breeding animals, were also popular motifs—from sculptures in the round to framing figures on altars or stands. Male figures in characteristic short dresses are shown in positions of work (Bolelli 1986; Laxander 2003; Meynersen 2004; D entzer 2003; Weber 2006). Yet, by far the largest number of depicted animals are lions and eagles, which might result from long-lasting traditions in Near Eastern iconography, but also from the predilections and the processes of artisans' workshops, since they are also common in the Golan and northern Galilee (Meynersen 2004; see Bobou and Raja, chapter 7, this volume).

There is a certain preference on the part of Ḥaurānite artisans to make their contribution to a dedication or an image-object explicit: at Seeia the statue of Galis gives the signature of its sculptor at the end of the Aramaic inscription. Finally, a priest of the sanctuary confirmed the dedication in Greek (Littmann 1913, no. 101).

Deities, but Not the Divinized Emperor

The people living in Graeco-Roman Ḥaurān could draw on an almost millennium-old set of Aramaic, Semitic, and Graeco-Roman deities (see Andrade, chapter 24, this volume). An Aramaic inscription from Seeia mentioning Baalshamin, Isis, Seeia, and an angel who were introduced to Seeia (Milik 2003; Dentzer-Feydy 2015) exemplifies this spectrum. A group of moving (images) of gods at Seeia are also referred to in an ANA-inscription from el-ʿĪsāwī, 70 km east of Seeia (Macdonald 2003, 278 n. 8; Macdonald et al. 1996, fig. 1).[7]

There are individual, locally rooted gods such as the god of Rabbos (*IGLS* XVI.1, 142–145; Fr eyberger et al. 2015, 135–169, second century AD), the god of Aumos (Waddington 1870, 2393–2395), or the above-mentioned Seeia, besides more widespread divine figures such as Allat, Athena, Baalshamin, Dusares, Isis, Tyche, or Baal (Sourdel 1952; Sartre-Fauriat 2015). Introduced from North Africa by the Legio III Cyrenaica, Zeus Ammon obtained a sacred building at Bostra (*IGLS* XIII.1, 9107).

Temples are as numerous as the gods and the settlements. Many of them stem from the Roman period—mainly the second to the third century AD. The sanctuaries at Sahr el-Leja, Sur el-Leja, Seeia, and Mushennef have evidence of earlier phases from the first century BC to first century AD, as does the small sacred precinct at Massakeb (Kalos 1999; Dentzer et al. 2010; Bar csay-Regner 2007; Dentzer and Weber 2017).

Comparable to the sanctuary at Seeia, Sahr el-Leja also consisted of a temple-theater complex (Littmann 1904, no. 100), where people could meet and watch ritual performances, as

well as courtyards, cisterns, and an area of encampments (Dentzer and Weber 2017, fig. 0.45). These facilities at temples point to their main purpose as meeting places to communicate not only with the deities but also with other people. To label these large complexes rural sanctuaries in an area with a patchy settlement pattern without *poleis* (Mazzilli 2018) is misleading. Their location and spatial qualities can rather be read as central places (Rieger 2017; 2019).

The layout and decoration of the temples attest to local amalgamations of various traditions and autochthonous ideas (Dentzer-Feydy 1986). The exterior of the sacred buildings with stairs, columns, and entablatures, as well as the interior with apses, niches, and podia show an elaborate style and workmanship, combined with individual spatial organization. Seleima/Slim, Atheila/Atil, Phaena/Mismiye, or Kanatha/Qanwat are good examples for Hauranite sacred architecture, which can be divided roughly into a late Hellenistic/early Roman phase and a renewal in the second century ad (Freyberger 2010–2011). The acropolis of Kanatha/Qanawat (temple 2) and the sanctuary of Seeia (Baalshamin temple) offer evidence of temples of the late first century bc (Freyberger et al. 2015, 56–85; Laxander 2003; Dentzer 1985–1986).

While worship of the divinized emperor was almost omnipresent around the Mediterranean, the Haurānites felt no need to worship the Roman emperor because of the socio-political constellations. The architectural ensemble of the Philippeion and the large exedra-building at Philippopolis/Shaba (Fig. 36.3) are remnants of a late and short-term emperors's cult for Philippus Arabs, since it was his hometown (Amer and Gawlikowski 1985). Only a type of building, the *kalybe* as a communal village building preserved at Umm ez-Zeitun and Hayat, might have included the cult of the emperor (Bru 2011; Clauss-Balty 2008a); a proper *kaisarion phaidron* is only mentioned once at Eitha/el-Hit (Waddington 1870, 2113) and a temple at Bostra (*IGLS* XIII.1, 9143).

Burying and Remembering the Dead

Families in Graeco-Roman Ḥaurān had various options for burying the deceased, all along the traditions of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean—either set up a stela with or without an image, or build a tomb, where an epigram could be added, or order a sarcophagus. The latter were local products, rarely imported, but still the choice also depended on financial means (de Jong 2017, 251–263, charts 20 and 21).

Architecturally the tombs varied from rock-cut tombs and hypogea to tumuli and circular or rectangular buildings (de Jong 2017, 43–44, 59; Oenbrink 2010; Sartre-Fauriat 2001), whereas the grave stelae made from black basalt can bear portraits that show the deceased in a manner known from elsewhere in the Mediterranean from the second century ad onward (Sartre-Fauriat 2001, 1:245–267; 2:103–122) (fig. 36.4). Striking are the poetic epigrams that make up the main part of the preserved inscriptions from Ḥaurān, offered as a service by skilled writers (Sartre-Fauriat 2001; de Jong 2017, 106, table 6; Bost-Pouderon and Sartre 2007). At the outpost and water supply point at Namara east of the jebel, the burials with often bilingual Greek and Safaitic inscriptions reflect the multiple identities of the deceased (Macdonald 2008).

FIGURE 36.4. Funerary stela of three individuals, Sachamelos, Enne, and Obbe, most likely a family, from the second century **AD** (Damascus, National Museum, inv. no. 7622; *IGLS* XV.2 543, Julien Aliquot).

Ḥaurān—A Distinct Region

Ḥaurān in Graeco-Roman times was a region with distinct socio-cultural characteristics, though it was well connected to neighboring areas. The people living in the basaltic region had various economic, political, and social backgrounds, but shared the common ground of Graeco-Roman Mediterranean and Near Eastern traditions. At the same time, Ḥaurānites developed their own expressions either in sculptural motifs and style, in epigraphic habits, in architectural layouts of public buildings and habitations, or settlement patterns (Stewart 2010; Poblome, Gerçeker, and Loopmans 2017). Due to the specific socio-spatial organization of Ḥaurān its inhabitants in Graeco-Roman times can only be understood by an approach acknowledging the local conditions (Horden and Purcell 2001; Jiménez 2016): the limited interest in marble, or in the emperors' cult needs to be explained from the socio-economic conditions of Ḥaurān, before we compare it to other regions of the Roman Empire.

From cubic sculptures to peopled scrolls in architectural decoration, from Ancient Northern Arabian graffiti to Latin temple dedications and poetic epigrams: the Ḥaurānite way of living reflects its position at the interface of the Mediterranean and the Near Eastern deserts.

Abbreviations

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IGR III. Cagnat, René, Georges Lafaye, and Victor Henry. 1906. *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*. Vol. 3. Paris: Leroux.

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IGLS XIII.2. Sartre, Maurice and Annie Sartre-Fauriat. 2011. *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*. Vol. 13(2), *Bostra (Supplément) et la plaine de la Nuqrah*. Beirut: Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient.

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1 See *The Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia* (OCIANIA), Oxford: The Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford. http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/.

2 See Atlas 02, monumentsofsyria.com/atlas/ (Ross Burns, accessed 22 May 2019).

3 http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0022620.html.

4 http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0018603.html, Shaʿaf; http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0051637.html, unknown provenance, on a stone vessel.

5 http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0030076.html, Zalaf; http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0003187.html, Wadi Ḥaurān; http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0026045.html, northern Jordan.

6 http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0035926.html.

7 http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0026968.html.

CHAPTER 37

DAMASCUS AND THE REGION FOURTH CENTURY BC–EIGHTH CENTURY AD

ROSS BURNS

Ptolemaic versus Seleucid Rivalry in Southern Syria

Damascus lies on the southeastern edge of the Anti-Lebanon Range. The site benefits from an oasis naturally replenished by the waters of the mountain snow melt. The Barada is the main stream whose flow irrigated a broad expanse of fertility won from this corner of the Syrian steppe. The Ghouta Oasis surrounding Damascus lay on two important communication routes, the north–south corridor skirting the eastern edge of the range and the east–west route leaving the Phoenician coast and rising to the steppe via breaks in the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Ranges (Rey-Coquais 1987, 191–216).

Damascus had served as the capital of the province termed "Beyond the River" (Euphrates) split off from the Achaemenid satrapy of Babylon and controlling all the territory between the Amanus Range and Egypt. The Achaemenid ruler, Darius, chose Damascus as the obvious point at which to base his court and its treasury while he moved into northwest Syria to counter Alexander's threat to Achaemenid control in the Levant. At the conclusion of the Battle of Issos in 333, Alexander sent a contingent under Parmenion to Damascus to recover the treasure and household members left there for safekeeping by the Persians (Curt. 3.13.15).

As Alexander continued south to Egypt, the administrative groundwork was laid with a governor, Memnon, replacing the Persian satrap in Damascus. Several Syrian coastal cities had already welcomed Greek trading communities. The choice of Damascus as the pole for the consolidation of Greek rule inland in the first decade was evident from the city's choice as a mint (Newell 1939). The subsequent creation of a new Seleucid capital, Antioch, however, introduced a new megacity that reduced the status of all existing inland centers.

Damascus suffered a further blow that initially held it back from prospering under Greek rule. It lay on the fluctuating boundary between Seleucid control from Antioch and Ptolemaic rule from distant Alexandria. Until the end of the third century, neither kingdom was able to pay much attention to a city with few advantages as a bastion along an ill-defined frontier. Damascus changed hands several times in the third century during the inter-dynastic "Syrian Wars" (Kosmin 2017, 305–307). A temporary change of name to Arsinoe may indicate a reassertion of Ptolemaic control under Ptolemy II Philadelphos (ruled 285–246 bc), a situation that continued until the victory of Seleucos III at Panion in 200 bc confirmed Seleucid dominance in all of Syria (Cohen 2006, 242).

The fragility of Ptolemaic rule as far north as Syria had reflected a lack of ambition to extend beyond the traditional Pharaonic homeland along the Nile. There is little evidence of any sustained Ptolemaic foundations in Syria or new Greek settlement beyond the coast until the second century. Over the course of the last two centuries bc, Syria began to host new colonies of Greek settlers, in some cases associated with a division of surrounding agricultural lands into Greek-held allotments. The first implantation of Greek grid-plan *katakoiai* (military colonies) came in the second century (Cohen 2006, 242–243). Analysis of grid pattern development in

Damascus's northern quarters can reliably be interpreted as a second-century expansion beyond the Aramaean settlements clustered around the road joining the Aramaean hamlets to the south (fig. 37.1 below) (Dodinet et al. 1990, 339–367; Will 1994, 9–10; Burns 2019, 27–28). The need to provide new settlement zones initially reflected a difference in the status of native and Greek inhabitants. There is no evidence, however, that a hard and fast distinction prevailed once Greek education was extended to people of Aramaean stock. (On the persistence of Aramaean influence through language, see Sader in Niehr (ed.) 2000, 36.)

Few sites in southern Syria, however, have revealed structural remains of the Greek centuries though remains of ancient grid plans can still be detected in modern layouts (Will 1994, 29–30; Burns 2019, 52–57). In most cases, their dimensions are considerably smaller than Roman urban footprints and only a few (Apamea, Epiphaneia, Beroia, Dura Europos, and Jebel Khalid) show a rigid adherence to a plan. Better insights into the pattern of evolution at another small Greek port town to a more ambitious layout in the Roman era have emerged from the recent exploration of the old city of Beirut (Sader 1998, 23–40).

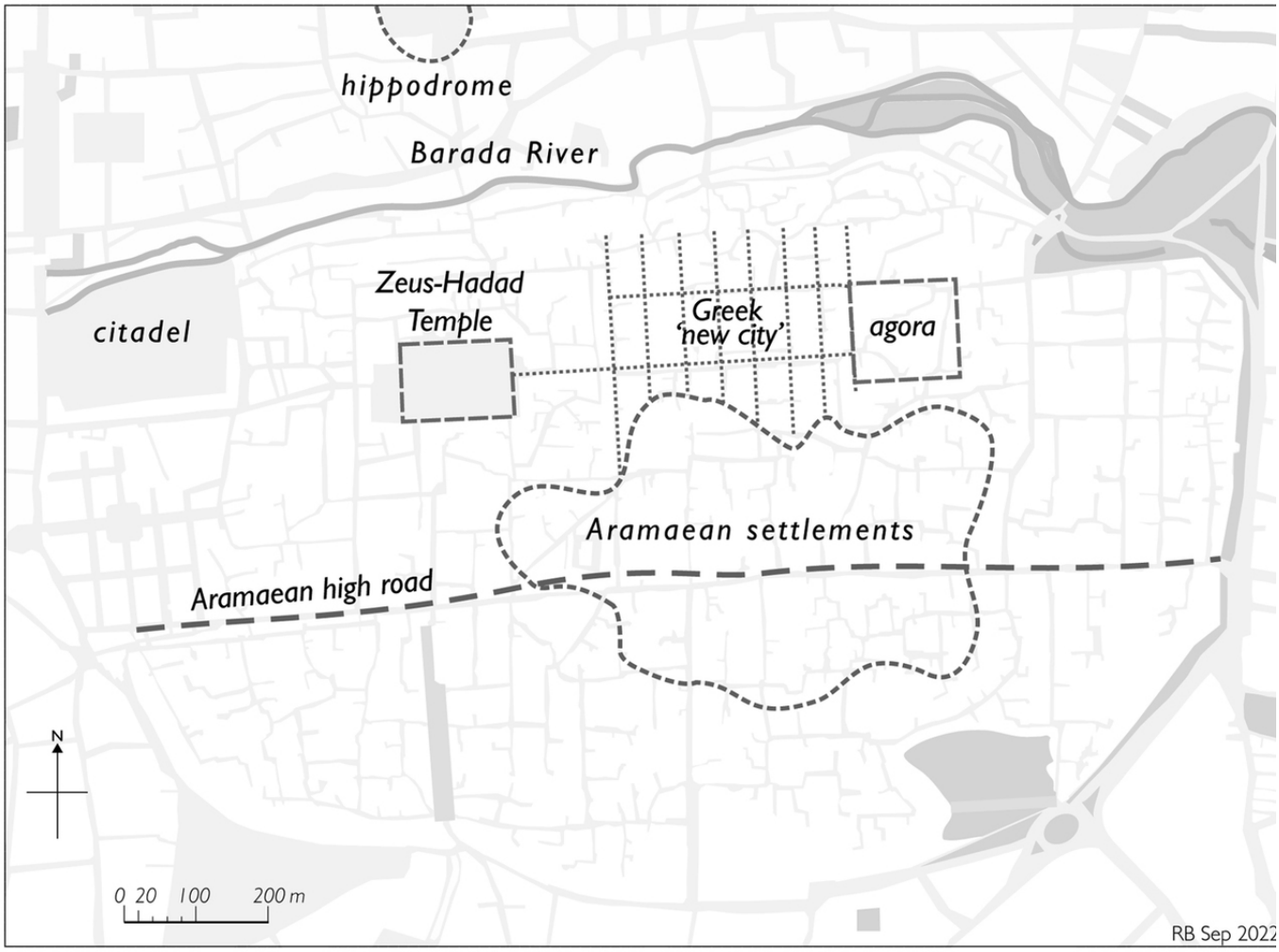

FIGURE 37.1. Map of identified features of Hellenistic Damascus superimposed on present-day street pattern (Ross Burns, taken September 2022).

Although no built remains of Hellenistic Damascus survive, the "continuity of use" rule can reasonably be applied to the space which still houses the principal sacred enclosure. The Temple of Hadad, known to be the city's dynastic god in Old Testament times, would later be

developed under Roman control as the Temple of Jupiter Damascenus, of which elements survive today in the Great Mosque (Akili 2009, 19–27; George 2022, 44–53).

The uncertainties that had prevailed in southern Syria in the third century bc lifted following the Seleucid takeover after 198 bc. The ambitious Antiochos III ("the Great," r. 223–187) entertained hopes of restoring Alexander's conquests further east. The final years of Antiochos's reign and his ambitions to strengthen the tradition of "Hellenism" may have marked the period in which Damascus was expanded through its new grid plan. However, the fact that the city a century later, in 90 bc, was renamed in honor of the Seleucid ruler Demetrias III (r. 95–88) may establish a firmer claim for this expansion (Kosmin 2017, 311).

The city was walled in the late Hellenistic period. There is a reference in Josephus to the surreptitious exit from the city of the army of a pretender (later Philip I Philadelphos r. 94–83) and his subsequent incarceration in the nearby hippodrome (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 13.15.1). The outline of a hippodrome survives outside the northwest corner of the ancient city in the street pattern not far from the present-day citadel (Burns 2019, 109–110 and fig. 4.3).

It was already evident by the second decade of the first century bc, however, that the Seleucid realm was disintegrating. The weakening of Seleucid control, already fractured by pressure from the Pontic ruler, Mithridates, saw the citizens of Damascus inviting the Nabataean Arabs based in Petra to protect the city from numerous challenges including other neighboring Arabs, the Ituraeans, and gave the Nabataeans a reason to rule Damascus from 83 to 69 bc, issuing their own coinage in the city (Meshorer 1975, 80; Burns 2019, 62).

Roman Rule

Pompey's move into Syria in 65 BC, and his abolition of the Seleucid dynasty, brought a largely orderly takeover of Syria by Rome with the creation of Provincia Syria. Trade with the east (Parthia, the Gulf, and India) began to flow with a new vigor. What had been a long faltering trade route now surged, responding to Rome's appetite for luxury goods notably the fabrics, precious stones, pearls, and spices of the east. The rising prosperity of the province ruled from Antioch saw Damascus emerge as a secondary beacon of Roman influence in southern Syria even if it had plentiful competition from other burgeoning centers of the Levantine coast and the interior (Burns 2019, 70–71, 74).

Syria provided a venue in settling the competition between military leaders that marked the last decades of the Roman Republic. The establishment of Provincia Syria and Pompey's triumph on return to Rome might have suggested the fate of the wider Syrian region was settled. Other Roman generals, however, still saw opportunities for aggrandizement and plunder in eastern campaigns. Crassus, then Roman governor of Syria, took his army of seven legions toward Mesopotamia in 53 bc. Crassus met a decisive defeat and his personal demise at the hands of the Parthians on the battlefield at Carrhae. It was little wonder that the loss of most of the Roman forces in theater left Rome's client rulers with the impression that little more than a decade after its annexation Syria was ready for collapse until rescued by new Roman deployments (Isaac 1984, 176–178; Str., *Geog*. 16.2.20, 37).

The Eastern Threat

For the next decade, the last stages of the Roman Republic were largely played out in the eastern provinces. Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 brought a new round in the contest which

saw Mark Antony and Octavian emerge victorious over Caesar's assassins at Philippi in 42. Taking advantage of the preoccupation of events in Rome and given the lessons that Carrhae had delivered of Roman vulnerability, the Persians swept into Syria in 40 BC. For three years, Provincia Syria virtually ceased to exist until Roman forces under Ventidius rallied to initiate the long process of recovery, settling the fate of client kings who had made wrong choices (Sampson 2020, 86–107).

A revenge bout with the Persians to redress Carrhae remained a Roman objective until Julius Caesar's assassination had put it on hold. Mark Antony saw a resumed Parthian offensive as a profitable move. In 34 bc, he sought to win the backing of the Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra VII, by assigning to her much of southern Syria including Damascus—a gesture dubbed the "Donations of Alexandria" that was to provide fruitful ammunition for Octavian's cause back in Rome highlighting Antony's profligacy and infatuation with Egypt's queen (Burns 2019, 66–69).

Antony's campaigns into Persia lacked any strategic plan and wasted much time and momentum with a disastrous diversion via Armenia in 33 bc. Any further operations against the Persians, however, were called off when Antony's forces were committed for the decisive contest with Octavian at Actium (31 bc). After his final victory outside Alexandria in 30 bc, Octavian annexed Egypt and toured Syria to reestablish imperial authority over the client kings and the cities that had declared for Antony. Syria was made an imperial province under the direct authority of Octavian (after 27 bc, Augustus) (Millar 1993, 32–38; Sartre, M. 2001, 470–476).

Security

Some inland centers, such as the territory of the Samsigerami near modern-day Homs (Emesa), would retain their client rulers until the end of the first century AD. The situation around Damascus was more complicated as the Ituraeans, who held substantial territory west of Damascus (including the Bekaa Valley) and on the eastern fringes of Mount Hermon (Gaulanitis), had long maintained their reputation for banditry. For some decades, the Ituraeans were left in the "too hard" category while the Herodian rulers were enlisted in Rome's efforts to keep the Ituraeans corralled south of Damascus (Aliquot 1999–2003, 272).

A second security perimeter was provided by a network of self-governing cities south of Damascus, curving around toward Palestine. They affirmed their self-governing identity, forming a loose association known as the Decapolis. During the first two centuries of Roman control, however, a more conventional pattern of provincial administration evolved, still standardizing the *polis* as the building block of administrative and fiscal control under a loose form of Roman administrative supervision. Internal security normally prevailed without garrisoning major Roman military units. Of the Roman legions based in Roman Syria and its environs, most were stationed to the north (Zeugma and Samosata) under a risk assessment that focused on campaigning into Mesopotamia against the threat from Parthia. Initially, the only legionary base in southern Syria was at Raphaneae, west of Emesa, probably established in the late Augustan years (Sartre 2001, 480, 484–485; Gschwind et al. 2009, 234–289).

While the borderlands of Ituraean influence west and south of Damascus posed continuing problems, Augustus continued to enlist the support of the Herodian dynasty in Jerusalem. When Herod died in 4 bc, he had already left his mark on Damascus, underlining its role as a center of Roman values enshrined in a large Roman theater and a gymnasium. Damascus quickly became attached to the benefits of "Romanitas" becoming the key center around which

the transition to Roman rule in southern Syria could be secured (Freyberger in Mortensen 2005, 181–202; Kosmin 2017, 315; Burns 2019, 70–71).

Being Roman

Most western Syrian cities with substantive Greek-speaking populations still took pride in at least nominal status as self-governing cities or *poleis* in the Greek tradition. Their populations included elements from all the waves of settlement into Syria over at least the previous millennium—Aramaeans, Arabs, Greek and in some cases, Roman settlers from units no longer needed after 30 BC. The notable case of a deliberate implantation of Latin-speaking settlers was Berytus (modern Beirut) and its offshoot, Heliopolis (Baalbek). But if it had been intended to "Romanize" the local population mix, even Baalbek gradually absorbed much of its local ethnic and linguistic base over the coming decades. On the whole, though, Syrian cities' inscriptions show an almost obligatory use of Greek with local languages in a secondary role. Greek seems to have remained the language through which the aspirant upper classes could strengthen their claim for Roman citizenship (Millar 1993, 527–528).

While our picture is incomplete, it seems that a member of a Syrian community, preferably a city, could move with relative ease into the wider Roman sphere. The pattern of exporting talent across the empire became obvious. One Damascene, Nicolaus, served as tutor in the court of Cleopatra in Alexandria but moved to Herod's court after the debacle of 30 bc. Hired by Herod for his literary skills, the Judaean ruler assigned Nicolaus to Rome as his resident lobbyist, undertaking after ad 14 a new role as the deceased emperor's biographer. Rather than being identified back in Damascus as a turncoat or court flunky, Nicolaus was remembered and praised for many centuries as an example of what could be achieved by a local boy made good (Toher 2009, 65–83). At the level of political office, however, it took longer for Damascenes to make it in Rome. There was no Syrian senator until the Flavian period while no Damascene ever attained such office (Bowersock 1989, 178).

Temple of Jupiter

We have some glimpses of what being Roman meant to Damascenes around the turn of the era in a project initiated shortly after Roman rule began. The townspeople of Damascus, whipped on it would seem by the temple priests, funded a new version of their Zeus/Jupiter temple, responding to the competition from other magnificent religious pilgrimage centers in the region. The affiliations of the donors were assembled by Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (1987, 213–216) in his study of the known temple inscriptions. The fact that the temple priesthood in Damascus seemed to be in the hands of luminaries carrying Greek names would appear to exclude any rule associating high religious office with a priesthood of exclusively Semitic lineage. Those of Semitic origin figured only as non-priestly donors. This would seem to nullify earlier assumptions that most Roman cities in inland Syria "remained what they had been, the residences of priests-kings: they never became regular Greek cities, like Antioch" (Rostovtzeff 1987, 1:269).

Moreover, the physical form of the Damascus temple initiated in the early first century ad told the same story of a blending of traditions and the rapid adaptation of Greek-Roman architectural models to a Semitic environment. Like the new temple enclosure at Palmyra, the Damascus complex comprised an inner shrine within a temenos. Though we have minimal

indication of the structures within the temenos, the remains of the inner enclosure wall and its soaring entrances convey a blend of Roman and Semitic/Aramean/Mesopotamian decorative styles illustrating a willingness to blend traditions within a repertoire of basically Roman structural techniques. The temenos would eventually be surrounded by a second enveloping enclosure to handle the huge crowds expected on feast days and provide ancillary facilities including a recently documented shrine carrying a dedication to Theandrios (Akili 2009, 16–19; Saad 2018, 65–72).

The Region under Rome

From Petra the Nabataeans had again extended their influence northwards as early as the second decades of the first century BC when they took advantage of the disturbed conditions in Syria during the breakup of Seleucid control. Though direct Nabataean rule as far as Damascus did not endure, after 65 BC, Rome had avoided a policy of confrontation with the Nabataeans. The area that had largely been under Nabataean influence was given new status within Provincia Syria when the southern members of the Decapolis were absorbed into the new province of Arabia in AD 106 (Graf 1992, 34–35).

In the region around Damascus, particularly to the south, architectural inspiration continued to represent a tussle between local and metropolitan influences. This partly reflected the difficulties of working the dark obdurate basalt of this volcanic region. Numerous temples sprang up in the Hauran, often upgrading simpler shrines that had originated in the Hellenistic era or earlier. In Canatha on the western slopes of Jebel Hauran upgrading was under way in the early imperial period, exploiting the flow of pilgrimage traffic to the traditional "Nabataean" site at nearby Siʿa. Some structures were given a distinctively imperial decorative stamp while reflecting continued Arab influence in their layout (Dentzer-Feydy 1986, 285–286; 2010, 225–238).

This process of absorption of the client kingdoms into the Roman imperium gathered pace after the challenge to the Roman order through the Jewish Revolt in ad 66. Four years later the imposition of direct Roman rule, however, reinforced the role of the councils controlling municipal affairs and whose members necessarily provided much of the funding for civic improvements. Competition for office was intense, and heavy commitments of funds via patronage were essential to kick-start major projects. While the initial emphasis under Roman rule was on temple projects, whose plans were so grandly conceived that completion often involved the work of decades, competition for office on the councils later emphasized massive benefactions for more routine works such as water supply or street paving. Initially, sponsors as generous as Herod the Great played a seminal role in funding civic non-religious improvements but ongoing useful projects by the second century ad became so ambitious they required a wide variety of funding. Imperial generosity might occasionally have been a factor (notably in cases of post-earthquake relief) but the length of time taken to see projects to a conclusion often revealed the challenge was one of raising funding column by column (Sartre-Fauriat 1999, 223–240; Burns 2019, 273–278). In the first and second century ad, Damascus was redeveloped on ambitious lines apparently as the Herodian civic projects (theater, gymnasium) were reaching completion.

Urban Development

In the centuries of Greek control, we noted the city's modest Greek grid spread north of the ridge path connecting the Aramaean villages—today's Straight Street or Via Recta stretching 1.8 km across the walled city. Under Rome, a second east–west axis bisecting the old grid was now widened to provide a ceremonial connection joining the city's agora to the traditional temple complex. These two routes became central features of an ambitious city replanning program begun early in the Roman period and in parallel with the temple rebuilding. The whole western half of the city now became a prestige zone laid out on a more lavish scale. At the western end of the Via Recta, the southern axis was extended to give access to the Herodian theater with a new enclave spreading north to the Jupiter temple temenos (Burns 2019, 75–76).

Perhaps inspired by existing attempts to provide weather protection to pedestrians, such as Herod's initiation of colonnading and hard paving on the main cross-city street at Antioch, the Street Called Straight at Damascus appears to have been an early case of monumental treatment to separate pedestrian spaces from wheeled or animal traffic. At some stage over the next two centuries both of the city's grand axes were upgraded with the provision of protective colonnading over their side passages. It is possible that this process on Straight Street began, however, as early as the Augustan period with provision made in the design of the still surviving Eastern Gate (Bab Sharqi) whose configuration of triple-arched passages separated by the beginnings of two lines of colonnades provided the template for the street's layout (Burns 2019, 150–155).

By the end of the second century ad, Damascus appears to have enjoyed even more ambitious upgrading probably reflecting the Severan dynasty's links to Emesa. Under Severus Alexander, or possibly as late as the reign of Philip the Arab, Damascus was declared *colonia*, a status already conferred on other Syrian cities including Palmyra and Dura Europos. Efforts to further upgrade the monumental appearance of the Jupiter temple included the great propylaeum giving access to the outer enclosure (*peribolos*) from the west, its columns still soaring above the eastern end of the main shopping galleria, the Suq al-Hamidiye (fig. 37.2). Other remains of the Severan upgrade include Bab Jayrun on the eastern side of the temple and the south doorway to the temple's temenos (Freyberger 1989, 67–72, 80–81).

FIGURE 37.2. Severan-era propylaeum leading to the west entrance to the Temple of Jupiter (Ross Burns, 2001).

The main entrance to the temple remained Bab Jayrun on the eastern side. Here the axis arriving from the agora approached a dramatic staircase rising to a grand propylaeum heralding the triple entrance doors whose openings survive.

Foreign Trade and Entrepreneurship

The economic underpinnings of this flamboyant prosperity reflected Damascus's position on the edge of a productive oasis. Though the yield was nowhere near as prolific as that of the extensive flood plains of the Nile Valley it supported an agricultural industry capable of sending its surplus in products such as fruit (notably plums and figs) and wine to markets across the Mediterranean, a trade reflected in several literary references (Gatier 2008–2009, 41–54). Possibly more important, however, was the position of Damascus as the last halt on the long trek across the steppe from the valley of the Euphrates. This route via Palmyra enjoyed a relatively short stage from Damascus to the Mediterranean ports, notably Tyre and Beirut—only a few days' travel using the passes across the Anti-Lebanon and Lebanon Ranges. As Roman rule was consolidated, too, the millennia-long north–south trade routes became more active with Damascus lying on the corridor demarcating western Syria from the more erratic rainfall zones on the edge of the steppe.

Moreover, Damascenes seem to have adopted with some enthusiasm the role of services provider in the wider empire. Apollodoros of Damascus, Trajan's favored architect—like many other Damascene writers, architects, and officials—may have headed to Rome via appointment to the emperor's Danubian campaign to practice his craft on a grander stage but his education in Damascus in the norms of classical architecture was clearly a sound basis for his career (Abd ulkarim 2003, 27–30).

Competing Faiths

The religious mix at the high point of Roman Damascus represented a summation of the city's past along with a preoccupation with pilgrimage traffic in the city's income from tourism. The great drawcard remained the Jupiter/Hadad temple, by then famed across the empire. Hadad, known from numerous northern Syrian reliefs brandishing his hammer as weather god controlling storms and rainfall, merged easily with Zeus and Jupiter. Numerous other cult centers of the Roman era surrounded Damascus though only a couple of minor shrines have been uncovered in Damascus itself. It was the Barada River, however, that was honored for its life-giving fecundity, and the Barada Valley was dotted with shrines and nymphaea honoring other river, storm, or astral deities (Aliquot and Piraud-Fournet 2008, 87–98).

Two text-based faiths were playing a role in Damascus in the Roman years. One of the formative episodes of the Christian tradition took place in Damascus where an early cell of followers of Christ had been set up by the mid-30s. In Jerusalem, an orthodox Jewish adherent, Saul, sought authorization from the religious leaders of his community to travel to Damascus to convince Damascene Christian followers of the errors of their ways. Shortly before reaching Damascus, divine intervention, in the accounts that were later to emerge in the New Testament, came through a flash of lightning rendering him blind. An accompanying voice from the heavens urged Saul to accept the error of his ways and enter the city where a Christian

adherent would give further instructions. Saul was led into Straight Street and introduced to a Christian convert, Ananias, who told him of his new mission to preach Christ's message. Saul accepted, adopted the new name, Paul, and made it his mission to spread the new faith among non-Jews (Acts 9; Galatians 1:16–18).

Damascus already hosted a long-established Jewish community, probably from the time of the return of exiles from Babylon. By the first century ad it was a sizable element of the population. When the First Jewish Revolt broke out in Jerusalem in ad 66, the Damascus Jewish community suffered when a mob of non-Jewish Damascenes targeted them in reprisal for the loss of Roman lives in the Jerusalem revolt. In Josephus's account the loss of Jewish lives (almost certainly overstated) amounted to over ten thousand with male members of the Jewish community locked up in the stadium and put to the sword (Jos., *BI* 2.559–561).

New Challenges

The Jewish revolt and the end of a long period of détente that had prevailed between Rome and Parthia brought new emphasis on the security of the Roman province of Syria. Under Tiberius, Rome and Persia had reached a tacit understanding that the Euphrates should serve as an informal line of control to the east. Weak security zones such as the Ledja south of Damascus and the unruly principality of the Ituraeans had been addressed and the new capital of Arabia at Bostra was assigned its own legion.

Hadrian (r. 117–138) felt the need for a tighter administrative structure in Syria with the awarding of metropolis status to more centers in Provincia Syria. Three regional centers, Tyre and Samosata in addition to Damascus, now held that honor (Burns 2019, 90–91). Rome had resumed campaigning against Parthia under Trajan but the emperor's efforts to extend Rome's frontier into Mesopotamia were reversed under his successor, Hadrian. The reactivation of the eastern frontier, however, brought a pattern of Parthian incursions into Syria under Lucius Verus in the 160s.

Following the assassination of the Roman emperor, Commodus, in 192 a number of hopeful successors emerged, one of whom was Septimius Severus. Severus had returned from a military posting in Syria where he had met and later married Julia Domna, the daughter of the Emesene high priest. To secure control of Syria, however, Severus had to put down the candidacy of another pretender, Pescennius Niger, then serving as governor in Syria. Niger's campaign to claim the imperial seat had gained Parthian support via the frontier kingdoms of Adiabene and Osrhoene. Severus decided his authority need to be imposed definitively by dispatching armies to put down Niger's rebellion. A further Parthian attempt to move on Syria required Severus to return with his army, this time incorporating Mesopotamia as a new Roman province alongside Osrhoene (Burns 2019, 94).

Other consequent changes following the lessons of Niger's rebellion and the openings it had given to Parthian meddling was a more radical reordering of provincial Syria itself. Inland Syria was now divided into two—Syria Coele (north) and Syria Phoenice (south). Not only was the province of Syria downgraded (due to its support for Niger) and made less unwieldy but its capital, Antioch, was given a moral dressing down by demotion to the rank of village, its status as metropolis transferred for a time to Laodicea, its neighbor on the coast to the south. Syria Phoenice was governed from Tyre, Damascus not meriting its own province until 395 (Phoenice Libanensis) (Millar 1993, 222–223).

Over the next century, however, there are indications that the auxiliary units (locally recruited) that had garrisoned much of Syria south of Emesa/Raphanaea, were being

strengthened with legionary units in hardened positions. Under Severus Alexander (r. 222–235) Legio III Gallica was moved south from Raphaneai to the edge of the steppe near the road to Palmyra at Danova (today's Mehin). This can be taken as a sign that the new threat was not just the Persians far to the east (under the Sasanian dynasty from 224) but the nomadic Arab inhabitants in parts of the steppe not fully under Roman sway (Millar 1993, 182).

By the mid-third century, the Persian threat had not only reemerged in a more persistent form but now followed a new line of attack via the lower Euphrates, picking off some of the fortified Roman positions including Dura Europos (256). This concerted Sasanian push had been preceded by a series of engagements along the Euphrates corridor in the 240s in which one Roman emperor, Gordian, had fallen victim to a Sasanian attack and a second had replaced him (Philip the Arab, r. 244–249) (Edwell 2008, 169–171). In 256, the Sasanian emperor, Shapur I, slipped past numerous Roman strongpoints across Syria and appeared without warning on the heights above the Roman theater in Antioch, interrupting an afternoon performance. Rome's humiliation was complete when in 260, a third emperor, Valerian, was taken prisoner following a Sasanian attack near Edessa and led off into humiliating captivity and death in Iran (Butcher 2003, 60).

The Syrian steppe could no longer be taken for granted as the arena where Rome held the upper hand. At a time of serial confusion in Rome that deprived the empire of a steady strategic response, the leader of the Palmyrene oligarchs who held sway in the city's council, Odenathus, was appointed Dux Orientis (260) to chase the Sasanian forces from Syria. He executed the task with enthusiasm, pursuing the Sasanian army as far as their capital at Ctesiphon. In a later campaign to aid the Roman cause in Asia Minor, he died in mysterious circumstances and the Palmyrene quasi-state came under the control of his widow, Zenobia, in 267. Perhaps wilfully, Zenobia interpreted the title of "Corrector of the East" that Rome in its weakness had assigned to her late husband, as a deliberate allocation of part of the empire to Odenathus and his descendants. Zenobia took the mantel of these responsibilities upon herself (nominally as guardian for her son, Vabalath). Perhaps in response to the threat Palmyra now faced from encroachments upon its commercial interests she campaigned into western Syria, Egypt, and part of Asia Minor. The empire struck back under Emperor Gallienus (later replaced by Aurelian), recovering Asia Minor and western Syria and beating Zenobia's forces in a decisive battle outside Palmyra. Aurelian at first opted for a soft reoccupation of Palmyra and headed home. A new revolt broke out, however, in 272 and the emperor was forced to march back to Palmyra to deliver a decisive victory. Zenobia was removed to Rome and the city became a Roman garrison town (Gawlikowski 2021, 74–83).

In fact, all of Syria now formed a front-line province. Under Diocletian (r. 284–305), a policy of a hardened frontier was adopted even if the nature of the steppe with its lack of geographic barriers meant that the fixed defensive points necessarily left many gaps. Diocletian's Strata Diocletiania swept diagonally across Syria to rush reinforcements to trouble spots. Damascus itself seems to have been a pivotal point, its selection as an arms-manufacturing base emphasizing a front-line role (Burns 2003, 61–65).

Wars with Persia

Persian wars became a constant distraction in the last three centuries of the Roman presence in Syria. Various strategies were applied to fend off successive Sasanian forays but all suffered from the disadvantage that no fixed line could in itself block a highly mobile Sasanian force. With the transfer of the Roman capital to Byzantium in 395, defending Antioch as the last great

fortress before invaders reached the ranges and plateaux of Asia Minor required a heavy buildup of defenses in northern Syria. This was partly done either through the establishment of new client forces based on Arab tribal affiliations or on civilian militia serving frontier agricultural projects. The thickening of the defensive zone is most evident in the semi-steppe terrain east of the line joining the main cities of the Syrian interior—Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. This marginally productive area, where Roman settled occupation had been thin on the ground, was now dotted with small Byzantine settlements, many with structures indicating a military role—defensive towers, fortified enclosures, manor houses with barracks attached to serve as mustering points for the forces assigned to a local landowner. This network would have presented no serious challenge to a Persian main force venturing across the steppe but at least provided an early warning against threats to the more productive agricultural areas along the Orontes Valley and around Antioch (Burns 2016, 1–59).

Christianity spread widely in Syria once the prohibitions on the faith were lifted under Constantine. The process was greatly energized by the presence of a monastic movement from the late fourth century when we start to see evidence of the first surviving churches. By the next century, construction programs accelerated markedly though even by the sixth century, the pattern of conversion was still patchy with the inhabitants of the steppe fringes taking longer to accept the Christian message (Trombley 2001, 2:374). Many villages would construct more than one church and by the sixth century some boasted five or six, usually basilica-plan and often with prominent baptisteries to draw in new converts.

Divisions within the faith, however, over ostensibly marginal issues to do with how the nature of Christ should be defined, masked to some extent subliminal differences between official (Greek-speaking) and localized (Syriac) tendencies. Even seven centuries after a Greek-speaking culture had taken root, clearly not all distinctions between Syriac and Greek strands of the population had been eliminated. These underlying differences may have facilitated the Sasanian invasion of Syria in 611 when for the first time, the Persians occupied the country on a continuing basis for eleven years until expelled by a punishing campaign under the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641). The fact that the Persians may have been more tolerant than the Byzantine rulers in accepting non-orthodox local churches perhaps set the scene for the Syrians' response to the next major incursion emerging from the east.

The Coming of Islam

When the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, Islam's formative decades in the Arabia Peninsula had already flagged the importance of extending the Islamic community north into Palestine and Syria, the direction taken by many of Arabia's traditional trade and religious links. Syria was ripe for the plucking, ruled by a Byzantine administration still scarred by earlier attempts to impose a heavy-handed orthodoxy and in a land ravaged by occupation and the prolonged war for its recovery. Not only did the Christian population see on the horizon just another faith-based movement claiming to complete the long prophetic tradition of the Old Testament but the Byzantine forces under Heraclius proved cumbersome and indecisive when maneuvered into a major engagement in 636 at the Battle of Yarmuk. Following the decisive outcome of the battle between a Byzantine field army and the forces of Islam, Damascus and other Syrian cities accepted Islamic rule by negotiation (Kaegi 2003, 241–248).

FIGURE 37.3. Courtyard, treasury, and prayer hall façade of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus built within the temenos of the Roman Jupiter Temple (Ross Burns, 2007).

The early years of Islam through to the Umayyad period carried on the administrative and artistic framework of Byzantine practice. In many ways Damascus's great congregational mosque (715) (fig. 37.3) was inspired by Byzantine monuments in its form and decorative detail, though as Akili has noted: "the unity of design and harmony among the masses and voids of the Mosque, and the ideal functional forms of its sanctuary, courtyard, aisles, vestibules and minarets were all new, unprecedented and unique … the product of the new emerging civilisation" that would inspire Islamic art across the centuries (Akili 2009, 6). The choice of Damascus as the Umayyad world's capital reflected its long tradition as a pivot between the Arab, Parthian, and Byzantine worlds and as a city accustomed to a blend rather than a direct clash of cultures. The Great Mosque survives today as witness to these absorptive processes.

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CHAPTER 38

TEMPLES, TOMBS, AND VILLAGES

The Limestone Massif in North Syria

MICHAEL BLÖMER

INTRODUCTION

The barren hills of the limestone massif in north Syria preserve a fascinating landscape, which is awash with ancient ruins. More than seven hundred individual sites have been identified in this area. Many of them boast of well-preserved monuments, some in an almost pristine state (fig. 38.1).

FIGURE 38.1. View over the ruins of the village of Sergilla, Gebel Zawiye (photo: Bernard Gagnon).

The majority were constructed in late antiquity. At that time, the limestone massif was densely populated and thriving economically. The impressive network of sites is frequently referred to as the "Dead Cities." This is a misnomer, however, because the area has always been a rural periphery, a landscape of villages in the hinterland of the two main cities of the region, Antioch near Daphne and Apamea on the Orontes.

The limestone massif consists of several separate mountain ranges, which are divided by plains and river valleys (fig. 38.2). The most important are, from north to south, the Gebel Seman, Gebel Halaqa, Gebel Wastani, Gebel Ala, Gebel Barisha, and the large Gebel Zawiye (fig. 38.1). The mountains stretch over approximately 150 km in length from north to south and 30 km in width. To the north, the area is confined by the Afrin River Valley, to the west by the Orontes River, and farther south by the Ghab Plain. The borders to the east are less clearly defined. In this direction, the mountains gradually descend toward the rolling hills and plains of central Syria between Hama and Aleppo. The eastern part of the limestone massif touches on the Turkish border, and a very small number of monuments are located on Turkish territory.

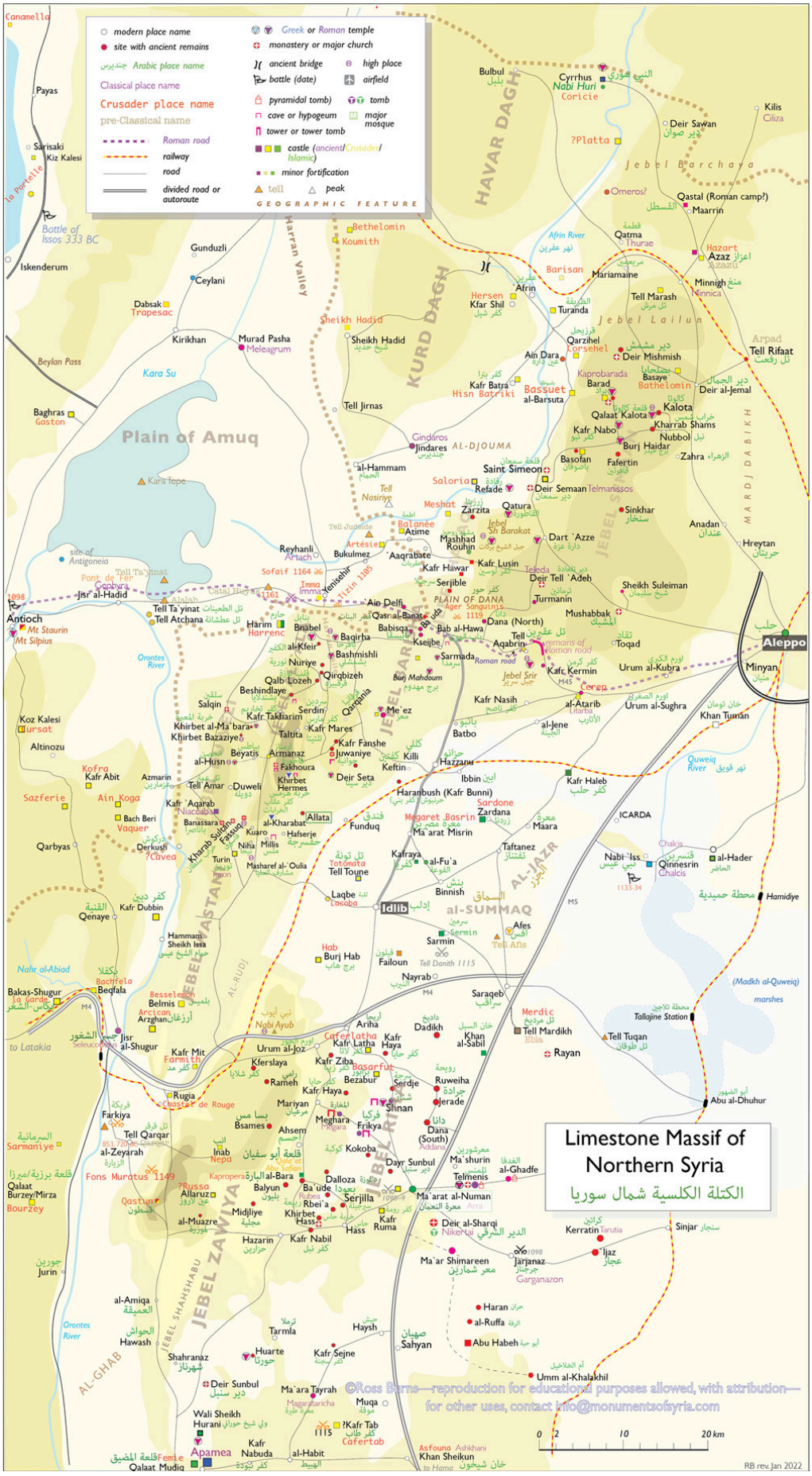
modern place name
site with ancient remains
Arabic place name
Classical place name
Crusader place name
pre-Classical name
Roman road
railway
road
divided road or autoroute
Greek or Roman temple
monastery or major church
ancient bridge
battle (date)
pyramidal tomb)
cave or hypogeum
tower or tower tomb
castle (ancient/Crusader/Islamic)
minor fortification
tell
peak
high place
airfield
tomb
major mosque
GEOGRAPHIC FEATURE
Limestone Massif of Northern Syria
الكتلة الكلسية شمال سوريا
©Ross Burns—reproduction for educational purposes allowed, with attribution—for other uses, contact info@monumentsofsyria.com
0 2 10 20 km
RB rev. Jan 2022

FIGURE 38.2. Map of the limestone massif and the surrounding region. Map by Ross A. Burns.

The mountains are formed from limestone, in some areas superimposed by basalt. Karstification has produced a very rugged landscape with barren hills intersected by rifts, wadis, and karst plains. With an average height between 400 and 600 m, the limestone hills do not jut out massively from the surrounding plains. The highest elevations range between 800 and 950 m. The geology of the limestone massif makes it a microregion that is very distinct from the neighboring areas. The mountains receive considerable rainfall over the year, but the water quickly percolates through cracks and fissures in the limestone. Over time, underground voids and subterranean aquifers developed, but the surface retains little water and perennial streams do not exist. Most suitable for agriculture are the plains, poljes, and dolines, where fertile clay-rich soils, mostly *terra rossa*, have accumulated. However, if managed well, even the rugged limestone hills with little soil cover are suitable for arboriculture and viniculture.

History of Research

The ruins of the limestone massif started to arrest the attention of western scholars late in time. From the seventeenth century onward, various travelers touched the region, but they showed only limited interest in its monuments (Greenhalgh 2015, 245–249). Exceptions were the church and monastery of St. Simeon Stylites in the Gebel Seman. This was due to the prominence of this place in Christian memory and its vicinity to the main road from Antakya to Aleppo (Loosely 2019). In general, however, the large number of ruins was just mentioned in passing and not explored in detail. The inhospitality of large parts of the region had fostered neglect, but more important was a widespread aversion of travelers to monuments of the late antique and Byzantine past.

This changed with the endeavors of two French scholars, the archaeologist Charles Jean Melchior de Vogüé and the epigrapher William Henry Waddington. They started the first attempt to explore the region and its monuments in a comprehensive way. During an extensive tour through the limestone massif in 1861–1862, de Vogüé recorded a large number of churches and monumental tombs, but also residential buildings (de Vogüé 1865–1877). Forty years later, the American archaeologist Howard Crosby Butler embarked on a mission that aimed to expand de Vogüé's work. In 1899–1900, he not only revisited all of the sites published by de Vogüé but also recorded many new monuments (Butler 1903). Butler and his team resumed the survey of the limestone massif in 1904 under the umbrella of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria (Butler et al. 1907–1949). They provided accurate drawings and the first photographic documentation of many sites. His work is still invaluable, not least because the repopulation of the region, which eventually led to the demolition of many monuments, had just begun when Butler's party surveyed the limestone massif.

Between 1934 and 1975, the architect Georges Tchalenko continued the exploration of the limestone massif. He dedicated most of his career to the sites of the region (Tchalenko 2019) and his narrative about the development of the villages and his studies of church architecture proved extremely influential. Tchalenko was the first to realize fully that the region prospered most between the fourth and sixth centuries AD (Tchalenko 1953–1958). The new picture of late antique opulence and rural wealth that emerged from his work changed the perception not only of the history of the region but of the early Byzantine period in general.

A milestone in the history of research was an excavation in the village of Dehes, which a French team under the direction of Jean-Pierre Sodini, George Tate, and Bernard Bavant conducted between 1976 and 1978. The first contextual analysis of archaeological finds and stratigraphic observations proved many established assumptions about the chronology of the villages and the use of specific types of buildings untenable (Sodini et al. 1980). In the wake of the Dehes excavation, the French archaeologist George Tate reversed many of Tchalenko's findings and developed a new comprehensive historical account of the villages and their economic and social conditions (Tate 1992). The foundation of his work was a new chronological framework that he based on the study of masonry types and architectural decoration. Subsequently, he initiated new fieldwork initiatives, most importantly at the village of Sergilla (Tate et al. 2013).

After Tate, no further attempts were made to write a new master narrative of the limestone massif, but a large number of individual studies has considerably improved the understanding of village life through time. They shed new light on the complexity and multivocality of the region, which forbids all-embracing interpretations and overarching conclusions.

In 2011, the ancient villages of north Syria were declared a UNESCO world heritage site. In that same year, war broke out in Syria and years of conflict have now taken their toll on the ancient monuments of the limestone massif. Fighting, the militarization of sites, and looting caused considerable damage. Moreover, the settlement of displaced people resulted in the repopulation of ancient ruins. In many places, new building activity and the expansion of agricultural exploitation threatens to obliterate the ancient heritage.

The Hellenistic and Roman Periods

So far, the earliest traces of occupation date to the later Hellenistic period, but it appears that widespread settlement started only in the early second century AD. At that time, the construction of villages, industrial installations, and monumental tombs started. Simultaneously with the emergence of the first villages, monumental sanctuaries were built, most of them located on prominent hills (Callot and Gatier 1999; Kreuz 2003; Steinsapir 2005). The largest sanctuary occupied the peak of the Sheikh Barakat Mountain, overlooking the Dana Plain (Tchalenko 1973, 115–127). It consisted of a square *periobolos* of 68 m with porticoes and a peristyle temple at the center. Construction started in the later first century AD, but it was completed only in the 140s AD. The Sheikh Barakat sanctuary was dedicated to the cult of Zeus Madbachos and Selmanes. The Semitic names indicate that the cult at Sheikh Barakat was rooted in pre-Hellenistic Aramaic religion (Millar 1993, 253–256; Marano 2022). The situation was similar in the other sanctuaries. At Qalat Kalota Zeus Seimos and Symbetylos were worshipped, Zeus Tourbarachos in Gebel Srir. In general, the character of the sanctuaries and the gods venerated in them suggest pre-Hellenistic roots. This is also corroborated by images of local priests, who wear distinctive costumes that stand in an indigenous religious tradition (Blömer 2015). There is, however, no unambiguous evidence for the existence of these sanctuaries in the period preceding Roman rule. It might be that these sites had been places of worship already in the Iron Age and the early Hellenistic period, but traces of cult activity have been overlooked so far. A more likely scenario, however, is that a large proportion of the settlers, who occupied the hills in the early Roman period were native Syrians from the surrounding regions. They transferred their ancestral belief systems to the limestone massif and created a new religious landscape that sported archaic features.

In general, the identity of the settlers in the limestone massif has been much discussed. A popular idea is that the settlement of Roman veterans and the arrival of Greek entrepreneurs facilitated the swift and successful colonization (De Giorgi 2016, 119–121). In inscriptions from the first and second centuries ad most names are indeed of either Greek or Latin origin. However, only a small number of these people can be securely identified as Greeks or Romans. In many instances, names reflect cultural choices rather than ethnicity. They attest to a *bricolage* of local, Greek, and Roman traditions, which shaped the cultural landscape of Roman Syria. It is therefore likely that the majority of the population had a Semitic background. Nevertheless, some Romans and Greeks were among the richest and most powerful new settlers in the region and we might assume that they had a lasting impact on the cultural and economic development.

Politically, most villages were part of the territory of either Antioch near Daphne or Apamea on the Orontes. Henri Seyrig recognized that the borders between the city territories in this region can be traced by mapping the use of specific civic eras—time reckoning systems—in inscriptions (Seyrig 1958). The use of the Caesarian Era in large swaths of the northern and central limestone massif clearly indicates that they were under the sway of Antioch, while the southern part of the Gebel Zawiye was under the jurisdiction of Apamea on the Orontes.

Compared to the plethora of late antique monuments, archaeological evidence for the occupation of the limestone massif in the Roman imperial period is scarce. Apart from the sanctuaries, the most conspicuous group of monuments dating to this period are tombs (Griesheimer 1997). Large mausolea and distyle funerary monuments bespeak of an elite of rich landowners (fig. 38.3).

FIGURE 38.3. Barad, Syria, Roman pyramidal roofed tomb (photo: Frank Kidner, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection PHBZ024.2016.6333).

Most common, however, were rock-cut underground tombs with multiple burial niches. Some of the tombs display painted decoration and reliefs, but not much attention has been paid to the locally produced sculpture so far (Blömer and Raja 2019). Funerary inscriptions constitute the majority of the epigraphic material of this period.

The sanctuaries and tombs attest to the existence of rural elites and the availability of skillful masons in the region in the second and third centuries ad, but few contemporary dwellings have been securely identified. This is the result of later reuse, but also due to the general difficulty of dating profane architecture if no archaeological or epigraphic evidence is at hand. It seems, however, that Roman-period dwellings follow similar patterns as the later residences (Ta te 1992). At the center was a walled courtyard with a rectangular two-storied house at one end. Frequently, the houses had a porticus opening on to the courtyard and additional buildings for farming were part of the ensemble. The masonry is usually of high quality, but the size of the rural dwellings is small if compared to the large estates, which existed in other parts of the empire.

Building activity slowed down considerably in the second half of the third century ad. Moreover, the quality of the few houses datable to this period is poor. A steep drop in the number of datable inscriptions corroborates a picture of general decline. This does not seem to have been the result of internal problems but a consequence of the catastrophic events that devastated the cities of northern Syria in the 250s. In this decade, the Persian Great King Shapur I and his armies invaded Syria three times and wreaked havoc in many cities (Dignas a

nd Winter 2007). In ad 253, both Antioch and Apamea had been sacked. The Persian onslaught did not hit the limestone massif directly, but the destruction of urban centers let the demand for agricultural produce decline, interrupted networks of exchange, and created a dire economic situation in the rural peripheries for decades to come.

The Villages in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantine Times

Like the cities of north Syria, the villages of the limestone massif started to thrive again in the course of the fourth century. In later part of that century, the number of new constructions started to rise dramatically. A second phase of intensifying building activity was the late fifth and the first decades of the sixth centuries AD. This period was the apogee of the villages in the limestone massif. Houses and industrial installations, but also churches and convents were constructed in large numbers. The magnificence of the buildings and the capacities of the presses and reservoirs speak of the economic strength of the region. A fine example of a prosperous village is Sergilla in the southern part of the Gebel Zawiye (fig. 38.1). The limited size of the village allowed archaeologists and architects to investigate all buildings in great detail (Tate et al. 2013). In the western ranges of the limestone massif, the village of Kafr ʿAqāb has been closely studied (Riba 2018). Yet, the classic case study is still the village of Dehes (Sodini et al. 1980).

The size of the villages grew in late antiquity, but like their imperial predecessors, they lacked formal planning. House types did not change, either, but decoration became more lavish (fig. 38.4). Moreover, a change from rough masonry with double rows to single rows of orthogonal ashlars is noticeable (Tate 1992). However, there has always been a plurality of styles and dating buildings exclusively based on the analysis of masonry can be misleading.

FIGURE 38.4. Sergilla, house, Gbel Zawiye (photo: Erik Albers).

With the exception of churches and communally used industrial installations, public structures are rare. Bath houses are present in a small number of villages (Charpentier 1994). At Sergilla, a building at the heart of the village has been identified as an inn. Tchalenko had interpreted a group of buildings at the center of some villages as meeting halls and marketplaces, but this notion has been dismissed since (Gatier 2001).

The financial power of some of the village elites in late antiquity is exemplified by fifty-six liturgical silver vessels that were discovered in the limestone massif in 1908 (Mundell Mango 1986). The vessels were produced in the sixth and seventh centuries. Many of them were dedicated by rich individuals to the church of St. Sergios in the village of Kaper Koraon. Today, the assemblage is known as the Kaper Koraon treasure.

Churches and Monasteries

Among the best-preserved buildings of the limestone massif are churches and convents. Consequently, the region has been of pivotal importance for the study of early church building in the Near East (Tchalenko and Bacchache 1979–1980; Sodini 1989; Khoury and Riba 2013). Archaeological excavations have been limited, so the understanding is based primarily on the study of the standing remains and the architectural decoration (Strube 1993; 2002).

There is no evidence for Christian cult in the limestone massif before the reign of Constantine (306–337), but in the fourth century Christianity quickly spread (Callot 1997). In the Antiochene, pagan cults collapsed quickly and were virtually extinct by the end of the fourth

century. The strong Christian urban elites may have fostered this process (Gatier 2013). In the territory of Apamea, the discovery of a late antique Mithraeum in a cave at Hawarte points to the persistence of pagan practices in elite circles (Gawlikowski 2007). A church superseded the cave in the fifth century ad.

The earliest churches of the region date to the mid-fourth century. At the end of fourth century, in larger settlements the construction of great basilicas that compare favorably with some of the contemporary urban basilicas started. Among the early monumental churches is the basilica of Julianos in Brad, which was completed in 402. The building displays the characteristic features of Christian sanctuaries in the limestone massif. Most important is presence of a bema, a sigma-shaped raised enclosure with seats that faces the apse at the center of the nave (Tchalenko 1990). The existence of the bema has important liturgical implications, but its precise function is still much debated (Loosley 2012). Apparently, the clergy was seated there during parts of the service, facing the sanctuary. It seems that at each site only the most important church was equipped with a bema. The vast majority of bema churches are known from the territory of Antioch, but in more recent times, a growing number of examples have been published from the territory of Apamea and from the middle Euphrates region (Balty 2013; Blömer et al. 2019). In the seventh century ad, the tradition of the bema ends.

In Brad as in most churches of the region, the apse is flanked by two annex rooms. The relics of martyrs were typically kept in the south-eastern annex room. The main entrances of the basilica opened to the south, where a porticus is attached to the south wall of the church. It leads to an open space encompassed by walls. This arrangement, which to some extent mirrors local house architecture, is typical for churches of this period.

A different type of basilica that was popular in the limestone massif is the "Weitarkadenbasilika," characterized by widely spaced arches resting on piers that separate the nave from the aisles. The most famous example is the well-preserved basilica at Qalbloze, which was erected in the 460s (fig. 38.5).

FIGURE 38.5. Qalb Loze, basilica, fifth century **AD**, view of the eastern part of the aisle and the apse (photo: Bernard Gagnon).

Monasticism played a significant role in the religious life of the limestone massif. Most important was the monastery of Simeon Stylites, who died in ad 459. He spent the final decades of his ascetic life on a pillar in the northernmost range of the limestone massif which today bears his name, Gebel Seman. Highly venerated already during his lifetime, Simeon quickly became one of the most prominent saints in the Byzantine world (Schachner 2010). A large monastery with four basilicas at the center that were arranged around the pillar of Simeon was constructed in the later fifth century (fig. 38.6).

FIGURE 38.6. Monastery of Simeon Stylites, Gebel Seman, basilicas surrounding the central octagon with the pillar of St. Simeon (photo: Bernard Gagnon).

The site quickly developed into a pilgrimage destination of international recognition (Sodini 2010; Loosely 2019). Only recently, archaeological excavations have started to shed light on the organization of the sanctuary and its surroundings (Pieri 2009). Less attention has been paid to the larger number of less prominent convents (Hull 2008).

Decline, Resilience, Transformation

When and why the village economies started to decline has been a cause of considerable disagreement. Based on a decrease in the number of dated inscriptions and general considerations about the political and economic history of the early Byzantine Near East, Tchalenko had interpreted the abandonment of the limestone massif as a consequence of the Arab takeover in the seventh century AD (Tchalenko 1953–1958, 1:300–318). However, subsequent surveys and excavations have piled up ample evidence for continued occupation and meaningful economic activity in the early Islamic period and beyond. The results of the excavations at Dehes had shown that the village houses were inhabited until the ninth and even tenth centuries AD. However, the intensity of building activity declined after the mid-sixth century. This reflects a general trend of stagnation in construction work in most parts of the limestone massif. Tate interpreted this trend as a sign of an economic crisis that was not caused by external factors, but by overpopulation and, consequently, shrinking surpluses and a Malthusian crisis (Tate 1992).

More recently, Jodi Magness (2003) proposed a radically different narrative. Based on a rapid reassessment of the material from Dehes, she claimed that building activity did not peak in the fifth and early sixth centuries ad, but a century later, between the mid-sixth and mid-seventh centuries. However, the evidence for the proposed revision of the chronology is weak. The argument rests on a very rigid reading of the stratigraphy and, most important, the associated finds. Yet, the most recent artifact dates an archaeological deposit only in theory, even in a reliable excavation. Considering the wider socio-economic development of the Near East and the epigraphic evidence, it seems prudent to stick with the established chronology.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that even though building activity slowed down considerably in the later sixth century, it did not stall completely. New churches and houses were still erected in the seventh and eighth centuries and the building of mosques reflects the emergence of thriving Muslim groups in the limestone massif (Charpentier 2013). In general, it now appears that Umayyad and early Abbasid rule offered sufficient security and connectivity for many village communities to prosper. Distribution patterns of pottery show that some areas of the rugged mountains continued to be part of a larger regional network in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods (Vokaer 2013). In general, it becomes increasingly obvious that it is impossible to propose narratives that apply to the whole region. Some settlements were abandoned in the seventh century, while others continued to prosper for centuries to come. A wide range of local and regional factors had an impact on the development of individual sites. A major change that affected the whole region occurred only after the Byzantine reconquest of Antioch in the tenth century AD. Subsequently, the limestone massif became a contested border region and for the first time military installations were constructed at some village sites (Riba 2018). Frequent raids devasted the region and made village life in the mountains unsustainable (Eddé and Sodini 2005).

Rural Economies

The first western travelers wondered how such a large number of villages could have thrived in such a rugged and inhospitable landscape. Pococke, who passed through the region in 1737, noted: "I was astonished to see such buildings in a place so retired, and in the midst of rocky hills, where there is no view or prospect of anything delightful" (Pococke 1745, 146). Despite the desolate appearance of the mountains in modern times, the surveys of the region have recorded a ubiquitous presence of presses and other industrial installations. This pointed to a flourishing arboriculture and viniculture. Tchalenko linked all presses to oil production. Based on the assumption that the wealth of the villages in late antiquity must have resulted from a market-oriented economy, he proposed that olive oil monoculture for surplus production was the driving force behind the economic success and he asserted that the produce was exported to the surrounding urban centers and beyond (Tchalenko 1953–1958).

Tchalenko's view still reverberates in popular accounts of ancient economy, but more recently, his model has been challenged and revised. A reassessment of the archaeological evidence, most notably the many presses, installations for water management, and field boundaries, has shown that the economy was more diversified than it was conceived of by Tchalenko (Decker 2001). Some presses are definitively oil presses, but many were used for the production of wine. In Dehes, a review of twenty-nine presses has shown that twenty-four of them were indeed presses for wine, not oil (Callot 2017). Recently, sweet wine made from semi-dried grapes has been identified as an important product of the region (Van Limbergen 2017).

The beneficiaries of the successful cultivation of the limestone massif were most likely free peasants (Tate 1992). It is difficult to reconcile the archaeological evidence from the villages with a model of economic exploitation by urban patrons and dependent tenants. Urban investors certainly existed, but the small number of large estates and the abundance of middle-sized farms that became more elaborate over time argue for a relatively homogeneous society. Some buildings stand out, but it is improbable that single individuals dominated the communities.

Another contested topic is the degree to which the villages were integrated in larger economic networks. While Tchalenko and others proposed that their success depended on surplus production and the export of produce, Tate argued that most of what was harvested was destined for local markets (Tate 1992). Indeed, estimates of olive oil and wine yields show that it is likely that much of the produce was consumed within the region (Van Limbergen 2015). However, interregional trade should not be disregarded. Imported goods, the gradual expansion and embellishment of houses and churches, and the employment of itinerant artisans show that the settlers made profits by selling surpluses and meeting urban demand.

An important key to the understanding of economic patterns that only recently has started to attract attention is the study of transport vessels in the region (Vokaer 2013). In the fifth and sixth centuries ad, when the villages were thriving, the most common type of amphorae was the north Syrian Amphora I. This very characteristic group of transport vessels is well attested in north and central Syria, from Zeugma and Doliche in the north to Apamea on the Orontes in the south (Strothenke 2016), but not in Antioch and other coastal cities. Transport vessels that are common in the coastal areas, like LRA 1 amphorae, have not yet been discovered in large quantities. This suggests that the limestone massif was part of a large economic network that comprised ancient north Syria and the middle Euphrates. Exchange with coastal Syria, on the other hand, seems to have been minimal.

The Limestone Massif in Context

For a long time, the prosperity of the villages in late antiquity has been portrayed as an insular phenomenon that relied on urban entrepreneurs who invested in the specialized production of cash crops to meet the demands of the regional urban centers and the wider Mediterranean world. The prosperous rural villages did not seem to correspond with the archaeological evidence from the neighboring regions, where thriving rural communities were far less evident. Moreover, the data from the limestone massif contradicted popular notions of the exploitation and suffering of late antique peasants. Consequently, the region was considered an anomaly with unique economic trajectories. Recent research, however, has shown that the perception of the limestone massif as an anomaly is flawed. It has become obvious that rural areas in all parts of the Near East flourished significantly in late antiquity. In the limestone massif, only the state of preservation of the ancient ruins is exceptional. As in other marginal zones of the late Roman East—as, for example, Rough Cilicia, the Hauran, and the Negev—two factors favored excellent conservation. The first was the use of durable building materials, which was a response to the abundance of stone that was readily available and the relative scarcity of perishable building materials such as clay and timber. In the fertile river valleys and plains, however, houses were often constructed from rubble and mud brick. They quickly disintegrated after abandonment, leaving little evidence if not properly excavated. The second factor that facilitated preservation in the limestone massif was the eventual depopulation in the Abbasid period. After a brief phase of resettlement in the Ayyubid period, for centuries only nomads

roamed through the barren hills. They used the deserted houses as shelters but did not dismantle them to retrieve building materials. In less marginal areas of northern Syria, however, that offered better conditions for agriculture occupation never ceased completely. Building materials have always been in high demand and ancient monuments fell victim to spoliation quickly. This has resulted in a strong bias in the archaeological record. Just as Palmyra and Dura Europos, with their well-preserved cityscapes, dominate the discourse on Roman urbanism in the ancient Near East, the limestone massif became the epitome of rural life in ancient Syria. Yet, the fragmentary evidence from recent surveys suggests that the lowland areas of Antioch and Apamea were as densely populated and as rich as the limestone massif (Casana 2014; De Giorgi 2016).

Acknowledgments

Research for this article was funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF 119).

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CHAPTER 39

HIERAPOLIS AND DOLICHE

Two Cities of Ancient Northern Syria and Their Cults

MICHAEL BLÖMER

Introduction

Hierapolis and Doliche do not rank among the largest, best-preserved, or particularly well studied cities of Hellenistic and Roman Syria. Little is known about the ancient site and the material culture of Hierapolis, and the investigation of the ancient remains of Doliche has only recently commenced. Furthermore, Doliche was a city of modest size and never attained the status of an eminent urban hub. Nevertheless, both cities developed into religious centers of supraregional significance. Hierapolis was famous for its sanctuary of Atargatis/Dea Syria, and Doliche was the home of Jupiter Dolichenus. The origin of these cults can be traced back to the Iron Age, but their popularity peaked in the Roman period. At that time, they attracted worshippers not only in Syria, but also in other parts of the Roman Empire. Consequently, both cults play an important role in the study of religious transformation in Hellenistic and Roman times in Syria and beyond.

Hierapolis

Ancient Hierapolis, modern Manbij, is located in Syria, northeast of Aleppo, at a distance of 18 km from the confluence of the Savur River and the Euphrates. The city lies at the intersection of important trade routes and is surrounded by fertile lands. No information is available about its foundation and early history, but by the late fourth century BC, it had become the most prominent city in inland northern Syria and the only place in this region to mint coins (Seyrig 1971; Mildenberg 1999). The coins also suggest that priestly kings ruled over the city during the reign of Alexander the Great. They also specify the ancient Aramaic name of the city, which was Manbog (MNBG). In some instances, Greek sources make reference to Bambyce as the indigenous name of the city, which is believed to be a corrupted version of the original name. In the Hellenistic period, the Aramaic name was changed to Hierapolis, a reference to the city's role as an eminent religious center. However, the frequent occurrence of the personal name Mambogaios or variants of it in the Roman period attests to the continued use of the Aramaic name by the local population (Yon. At the end of antiquity, the original name of the city became prevalent again and it is still in use today.

The minting of autonomous coins in Hierapolis ceased during the reign of Seleucus I. For the subsequent period, little reliable information on the development of the city is available. In his book *De Dea Syria*, Lucian reports that Stratonike, the wife of Seleucus I, was instructed in a dream to build a new temple in Hierapolis Lucian (Lucian., *Syr. D.* 17–27). This narrative may reflect benefactions to the sanctuary during the reign of Seleucus I, but there is no archaeological evidence to substantiate this claim. Nevertheless, the construction of a sanctuary for the gods of Hierapolis on the island of Delos in the second century bc indicates

the city's integration into international trade networks (Will 1985). In the early first century bc, Hierapolis was ruled by a local dynast named Dionysius, who also presided over the neighboring city of Beroea (Str. 16.2.7). Soon after, the city became part of the Roman province of Syria. In the context of Crassus's Parthian campaign in 56/55 bc, Plutarch refers to the treasures of the temple (Plut., *Crassus* 17).

For the Roman period, scattered archaeological and literary evidence suggests that Hierapolis and the sanctuary continued to flourish. The great goddess of Hierapolis figures prominently in several literary texts from Roman imperial times, most prominently in Lucian's book *De Dea Syria* (van Berg 1972; Lightfoot 2003). The emission of civic coins resumed in the second century. Like most cities of north Syria, Hierapolis was destroyed by the Persian Great King Shapur I in ad 253, but the city recovered soon and replaced Zeugma as the most important hub of north Syria. When the pilgrim Egeria visited Hierapolis in ad 415, she described the city as very prosperous (Egeria 18.1). At that time, it was the metropolis of the province of Euphratesia. After the Arab conquest, the city continued to play an important role as an urban, military, and ecclesiastical center (Eger 2016). It was only abandoned after the Mongols sacked the city in ad 1260. Subsequently, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes lived in the area. Travel reports of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicate that the ruins of the ancient and medieval city were still well preserved (Maundrell 1810, 204; Pococke 1745, 166–167). This rapidly changed when Circassians were settled in Manbij after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877–1878. They dismantled the ruins to collect material for new buildings. A few decades later, all traces of antiquity had disappeared.

No systematic archaeological reconnaissance work has been conducted at Hierapolis. The French archaeologist Paul Perdrizet opened some test trenches in 1925, but disappointed by the results he halted work after ten days (Provost 2013). Between 1999 and 2001, a Spanish team directed by Alejandro Egea Vivancos surveyed Hierapolis and its surroundings (Egea Vivancos 2005). They failed to discover substantial remains from antiquity but traced the remains of underground water conduits (qanats), which transported water to the city. During the civil war in Syria, the site suffered from looting and the targeted destruction of antiquities (Almohamad 2021).

Consequently, knowledge of the layout of the ancient city is very limited. Travel reports and brief descriptions of the site from the early twentieth century constitute the main source of information on archaeological remains, but most of the monuments they mentioned appear to be of medieval date (Hogarth 1907/1908; Cumont 1917, 35–41). The most important exception is a large artificial pond of rectangular shape and some adjacent structures, which must have been part of the city's main sanctuary (fig. 39.1). Parts of the retaining walls of the pool are still preserved today next to a football pitch.

FIGURE 39.1. Manbij/Hierapolis, water pool and ruins of the sanctuary in 1911, Max von Oppenheim. © Hausarchiv des Bankhauses Sal. Oppenheim.

In general, we may assume that Hierapolis looked like contemporary cities of Syria in the Roman period with monumental buildings like colonnaded streets, baths, and other public buildings. Yet, it would be interesting to know if the prominent role of the main sanctuary affected the urban plan and if pre-Hellenistic indigenous traditions resonated more strongly in the material culture of Hierapolis than in cities founded in the Hellenistic period.

The only substantial group of ancient objects that can be attributed to Hierapolis are sculptures that were produced in the Roman imperial period. Some of them have a religious character and are of great importance for the understanding of the religious life in the Roman period. Very prominent are depictions of priests that substantiate the assumption that priests still played a crucial role in the city's life (Stucky 1973). Yet, most sculptures are funerary reliefs and statues. They share characteristics with the funerary sculpture of Zeugma in the north and Palmyra in the south and provide an idea of the self-representation of the urban elites (Blömer 2014, 69–70; Rumscheid 2019).

The Deities of Hierapolis

The religion of Hierapolis/Manbij centered on the dyad of a storm god Hadad/Zeus and the great goddess Atargatis/Dea Syria. The age and origin of the cult cannot be determined with certainty, but the coins minted at Manbij in late fourth century BC confirms that Atargatis/Dea Syria was the main deity of the city at that time. The Aramaic legends on these coins identify her as ʿTRʿTH (ʿAtarʿateh) or ʿTH (ʿAteh). This suggests a relation to the Phoenician goddess Anat, mistress of the animals and companion of Bel, but it cannot be decided to what extent

the goddess of Manbij/Hierapolis retained the character of Anat. The images of the goddess in the early coinage vary significantly (Seyrig 1971; Blömer and Nieswandt 2016). Some of them emulate standard types of contemporary divine representation. Some, however, are more evocative. Intriguing are portraits that show her with pigtails wearing a turreted crown or a pointed hat (fig. 39.2). On rare issues, she is standing in front of an incense burner with a dove in her hand or sits on the back of a lion. These images offer exceptional insights into the repertoire of religious iconography of north Syria on the brink of the Hellenistic period. From the subsequent centuries, no depictions of the goddess have come down to us. Only under Roman rule, were new images of Atargatis/Dea Syria produced. She figures prominently on some of the coins that were minted at Hierapolis in the second and third centuries. The goddess is usually sitting on a throne that is flanked by a pair of lions. Some coins show her seated on a lion. In general, her iconography converged with the iconography of Kybele (Hörig 1978). The coin legends identify her as the Syrian goddess of the Hierapolitans.

FIGURE 39.2. Manbij (Hierapolis), late fourth century **BC**, didrachm in the name of the Abd Hadad, silver, 7.85 g, British Museum 1902,0610.55. © Trustees of the British Museum.

An important but challenging contemporary source for the cult in the Roman period is the famous book *De Dea Syria* (Lightfoot 2003). It provides a wealth of information about the gods of Hierapolis, the sanctuary, and the rites performed. The authorship is commonly attributed to the famous writer Lucian of Samosata, who lived in the second century ad (Lightfoot 2003, 184–208). A native of Samosata, Lucian was a himself Syrian and probably familiar with the cult and the city. Nevertheless, his account of the religious life of Hierapolis is very much influenced by Greek models of ethnographical analysis, especially Herodotus, and by the Hellenistic genre of local histories. It was not the author's intention to present a comprehensive and authentic picture of the goddess of Hierapolis. The conventions of the genres and the attempt to translate the local rites for an audience unfamiliar with Syrian religion severely limit the value of the book for the reconstruction of the cult. Nevertheless, the text must not be disregarded as a source of information. Some of Lucian's observations are in accord with the scarce archaeological evidence and can contribute to a better understanding of the lived religion of Hierapolis. Notable are the remarks about festivals, religious practices like self-castration, the significance of fish and doves, and the role and the dress of priests in the city.

He also describes the appearance and the character of the cult images that displayed at the sanctuary.

Depictions of these cult images have survived in a small number of limestone reliefs and, most important, on civic bronze coins and silver tetradrachms, which were issued in the name of Hierapolis (Seyrig 1960; 1972; Butcher 2004) (fig. 39.3).

FIGURE 39.3. Caracalla, **AD** 215–217, Hierapolis, tetradrachm, silver, 14.61 g, British Museum 1985,1114.6AN691395001. © Trustees of the British Museum.

The coins univocally show the divine couple frontally seated side by side. The male consort of Atargatis/Dea Syria, the storm god Hadad, identified in Roman times as Zeus, is seated on a throne flanked by bulls. He wears a kalathos on his head and holds a scepter. Contrary to most other cities of northern Syria where the ancient storm god in the guise of Zeus stood at the center of the local panthea, he played only an ancillary role in Hierapolis.

Between the divine couple stands a cultic standard. It is a pole decorated with circular plaques, has a crossbar with tassels hanging down, and can be surmounted by a triangle with a dove on top. Lucian and other sources report that it was called *semeion*, which is the Greek word for a standard. The *semeion* resembles Roman military standards, but it clearly stands in a very old pre-Hellenistic tradition (Matthiae 2014). Similar cultic standards play an important role in many indigenous cults of north Syria and Mesopotamia (Downey 1970; Dirven 2005). The precise meaning and role of the standard in Hierapolis is not known, but it may have served as a portable cult image that represented either Hadad or Atargatis or aspects of them rather than being the manifestation of an individual deity.

A third god worshipped at Hierapolis went by the name Apollo in the Hellenistic and Roman period. It is generally believed that this Apollo was an interpretation of the Mesopotamian god Nabu. Lucian and Macrobius, a fourth-century writer, mention the Apollo of Hierapolis (Lucian., *Syr. D.* 35; Macrob. 1.17.66–67). The latter describes his image as bearded, wearing a cuirass and a kalathos, with eagles at the sides and a female figure in front of him. This description accords with a small number of sculptures, most notably a statue from the Mesopotamian city of Hatra, but also in Rome (Kropp 2013; Dirven and Messina 2020). Furthermore, tetradrachms

minted for Hierapolis under Caracalla show the image of the god on the shield of the emperor, and gemstones depict him next to the cultic standard, the *semeion* (Blömer 2014, 164–171).

Beyond Hierapolis, the cult of the Atargatis/Dea Syria is variously attested in Syria. In other areas of the Roman Empire, archaeological evidence for her veneration is scarce, but references to her cult in literary sources and inscriptions attest to a certain popularity (van Berg 1972). In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, the goddess and her followers are portrayed as barbaric and alien (Soler 2011).

Doliche

Doliche is located in modern Turkey on the periphery of the city of Gaziantep. The city area spreads over a natural hill at the edge of a fertile plain at the intersection of important trade routes. Doliche is rarely mentioned in the ancient written sources and not much is known of its history in the Graeco-Roman period. The name of the city, which has a pendant in Thessaly, suggests a Seleucid (re)foundation of the early Hellenistic period. In the first century BC, Doliche became part of the kingdom of Commagene, but it was attached to the Roman province of Syria after the Battle of Actium. Recent excavations have shown that Doliche flourished in the imperial period. At the center of the city, remains of public baths, the city archive, and a monumental temple were discovered (Blömer at al. 2019; Blömer and Winter 2022). The city was destroyed by the Persian Great King ShapurI in AD 253. After a period of decline, Doliche recovered in the fourth century AD and thrived in the early Byzantine period. In the seventh century AD, Muslim Arabs captured the region and turned Doliche into a border fortress. After the Byzantine reconquest in AD 962, the city became the capital of a Byzantine border province and finally a fortress of the crusader county of Edessa. Nur ad-Din sacked the city in AD 1156. Subsequently the neighboring fortress of Ayntab (modern Gaziantep) replaced Doliche as the main regional center.

Doliche is primarily known for its main deity, Jupiter Dolichenus. In the early second century ad, his cult suddenly spread over large parts of the Roman Empire. Jupiter Dolichenus became especially popular in the Danube and Rhine areas, in Britain, and in the city of Rome. This prominence in the frontier zones was primarily due to the god's appeal to Roman military personnel (Speidel 1978; Collar 2013). Yet, large parts of his followers were civilians including women and slaves. The organization of the cult and the principles of belief remain largely obscure. Inscriptions stress the omnipotence of the god and his close relation to the Roman state. The popularity of the cult peaked in the Severan period. Modern scholarship for a long time perceived Jupiter Dolichenus as a prime example of "oriental" religions in the Roman Empire. Consequently, a large array of studies on his cult and his monuments exists (Hörig and Schwertheim 1987; Blömer and Winter 2012; Sanzi 2013).

The Sanctuary on Dülük Baba Tepesi

The original sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus in Doliche has arrested attention only recently. It is not located in the city, but on the peak of Dülük Baba Tepesi, a 1,204 m high mountain that towers over Doliche (fig. 39.4).

FIGURE 39.4. View of the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus on the summit of Dülük Baba Tepesi. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

Franz Cumont was the first scholar to identify the site during his travel to north Syria in 1907 (Cumont 1917, 182–187). Stray finds that were collected in the subsequent decades corroborated his assumption (Wagner 1982). However, the unassuming character of the ancient remains and restricted access to the site prevented a detailed exploration. Systematic archaeological investigations began only in 2001. Since then, substantial parts of the sanctuary have been excavated and the results of fieldwork have furthered the knowledge about the cult considerably (Winter 2011; 2014; 2017).

Important was the discovery that the sanctuary began operating in the early first millennium BC (Blömer 2015; Messerschmidt 2023). The early sanctuary was an enclosed rectangular precinct. Within the enclosure, no traces of architecture have survived, but massive ash layers with hundreds of thousands of animal bones that have been found both inside and outside the perimeter suggest that an ash altar was the focus of cult activities (Pöllath and Peters 2011). Many votive offerings from the late Iron Age corroborate that the sanctuary flourished in the late Babylonian and Persian periods (Schachner 2014; 2019).

In the early Hellenistic period, the place of worship continued to operate as before. Only in late Hellenistic times did major changes occur. The sanctuary expanded and ashlar masonry replaced the mud-brick architecture. The expansion continued in the Roman imperial period. It is, however, difficult to get a clear idea of the layout of the sanctuary at that time and its

splendor, because later destruction, reuse of building material, and recent pillaging of the site have wreaked considerable havoc. Finds of architectural elements corroborate the existence of a large main temple, but ascertaining its location has not been possible to (Oenbrink 2019). Better preserved are sections of paved courtyards, terrace walls, and foundations of several secondary buildings. But their function has not been determined yet. It is important to note that its character differed considerably from the places of worship known from the western provinces. The latter were similar to Mithras sanctuaries and centered on a banquet room with a cult image that could accommodate a small group of worshippers who deliberately chose to be part of this community (Schwarzer 2012). The Doliche sanctuary, however, was of substantial size and resembled the large civic sanctuaries of the Near East. Yet, it is also important to keep in mind that it was far less monumental than the grand sanctuaries of Palmyra, Damascus, or Baalbek.

While it is hard to draw definite conclusions about the cult in Roman times based on the study of the architecture, the analysis of finds of this period gives valuable important new insights. There is evidence for a continuation of Iron Age rites and, in general, material culture and iconography accord largely with the evidence for religious practice in other local cult centers of north Syria. However, it is also obvious that the sanctuary not only catered to the needs of the local population. Finds of Roman military equipment and a high proportion of Latin inscriptions indicate the presence of Roman soldiers and visitors from the West in the sanctuary (Blömer and Facella 2022). In general, it appears that the communities of worshippers in the Western Empire and the Doliche sanctuary were more closely connected than has generally been assumed.

There is evidence for a destruction event that can be related to the Persian incursion in ad 253, and it appears that the sanctuary largely ceased to operate. In the early Byzantine period, the monastery of St. Solomon was established in the ruins. It flourished considerably in the subsequent centuries and a large part of material recovered in the excavations belongs to this Christian phase of occupation. The monastery was abandoned in the twelfth century ad. Later, the tomb of a Muslim holy man was constructed close to the site and continued the tradition of the mountain as a place of reverence.

The Deities of Doliche

Iuppiter Dolichenus can be easily recognized as his iconography differs from standard Graeco-Roman modes of divine representation. He stands on the back of a bull and brandishes his weapons, a thunderbolt in his projected left and a double-axe in the raised right hand. This distinctive iconography closely resembles the image of the ancient Near Eastern storm god (Bunnens 2006). The underlying Iron Age model underwent substantial modifications in the Roman period and was adapted to contemporary visual norms. Most important, many monuments show the god wearing a military uniform that resembles a Roman military dress and a Phrygian cap. Conversely, some features of Iron Age divine images like the horned crown and the pigtail have been discarded. It is noteworthy, however, that in the Doliche sanctuary images of the god that closely follow the ancient Near Eastern iconography were still produced in Roman times. A basalt stele discovered at the sanctuary presents an image of the god that diligently copies the Iron Age iconography of the storm god (Blömer 2011) (fig. 39.5). There are only a few indications that betray a date of origin in the Roman period. The stele clearly suggests that Iron Ages monuments were still present in Roman times. Yet, the canonical Roman image of the god was present at the sanctuary, too.

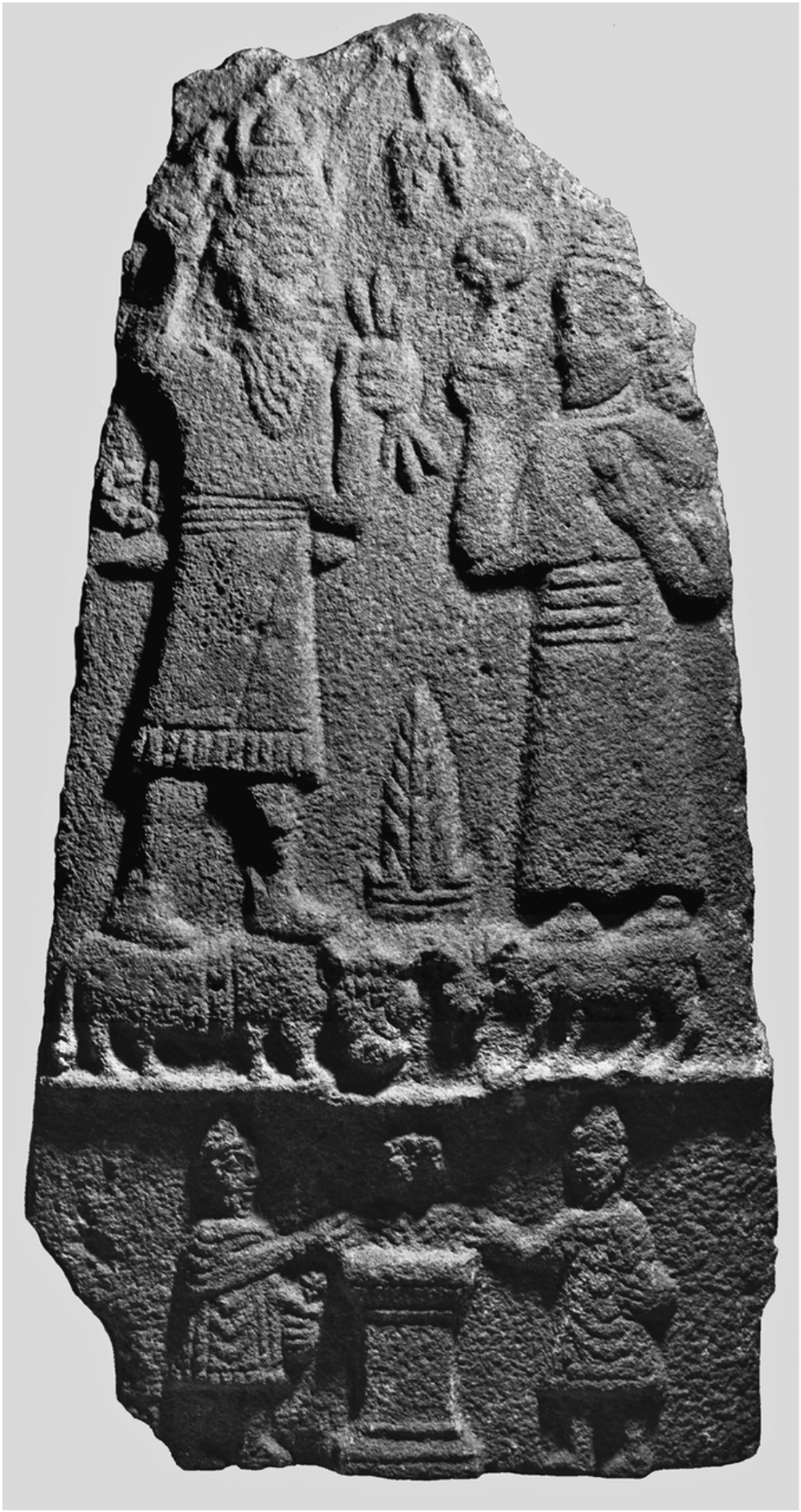

FIGURE 39.5. Stele with the image of the divine couple of Doliche, Dülük baba Tepesi, Basalt, H 1.30 m, Roman imperial period, Gaziantep Museum. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

Jupiter Dolichenus had a consort, who is identified as Juno Regina in Latin inscriptions. She stands on an animal, too, which is typically a deer. Her attributes vary, but she frequently holds a mirror and a scepter. In the stele from the Doliche sanctuary, she is equipped with a mirror and a pomegranate. In this image, her iconography clearly follows Iron Age models for the depiction of female deities. It is important to note that a fragment of a stele with a corresponding effigy of a goddess from the ninth century BC has been found in the sanctuary (Blömer and Messerschmidt 2014). This find strengthens the case for the continued presence of Iron Age monuments in the Roman period.

Other deities were worshipped along with Iuppiter Dolichenus and his consort in the sanctuary (Blömer and Facella 2022). Among them was the enigmatic god Turmasgade (Blömer and Facella 2017). The name can be translated as "mountain of the prayer/adoration" or "mountain of the sanctuary" from Aramaic *tur* ("mountain") and *msgd'* ("adoration, place or object of adoration"). Ten inscriptions from different parts of the Roman Empire mention the god, but no image of him has been identified yet. The name suggests that he was a mountain god. Circumstantial evidence, most importantly the presence of a dedication to Turmasgade in the sanctuary of Iuppiter Dolichenus at Dura Europos, suggested a connection between the two deities. The discovery of a votive altar for Turmasgade in the Doliche sanctuary has confirmed that hypothesis. We still lack any precise information about the character of the god and his role in the pantheon of Iuppiter Dolichenus, but his affinity with Doliche is beyond doubt.

Another large stele from the sanctuary shows the image of a bearded god rising from a chalice of flowers and grasping a tree (Blömer 2017) (fig. 39.6). He might be a god connected to fertility or a mountain god, but his effigy has no convincing parallel in ancient iconography. The stele underlines the strong locative character of the cult that frequently defies interpretation.

FIGURE 39.6. Stele with the image of an unknown deity, Dülük Baba Tepesi, basalt, H 1.70 m, Roman imperial period, Gaziantep Museum. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

Final Thoughts

The cities of Hierapolis and Doliche and their principal deities provide important case studies for the development of Near Eastern religion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In both cities, religious life centered on the dyad of the great goddess and the storm god and questions of continuity and transmission of ancient Near Eastern religious traditions are of great significance. At first glance, the deities appear to be very ancient, and it has been argued that they stand in Hittite or Aramaic traditions. More recently, however, scholars have challenged this view, as evidence for the antiquity of cults in Roman Syria is generally elusive. Even when connections to the pre-Hellenistic past can be established, the links are frequently generic and do little to confirm the continuity of specific religious ideas. Consequently, archaic forms and features have been dismissed as reinventions or revivals. Against this background, the results of the excavations of the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus are of great importance. They clearly show that the cult is of ancient Near Eastern origin. The uninterrupted use of the sanctuary, the continued presence of Iron Age objects, and a priesthood that transmitted ancient lore may have facilitated the survival of Iron Age images and religious ideas. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine the extent to which ancient Near Eastern religious ideas indeed survived and how ancient symbols were perceived in the Roman period. In general, it seems best to replace the dichotomy of continuity and change with a more nuanced picture of a fluid development involving the coexistence of different and even conflicting ideas, images, and beliefs.

Among the many cults of Syria, the deities of Doliche and Hierapolis stand out because they developed a strong diaspora. By the second century ad, Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria were venerated in many parts of the Roman world while most deities from Syrian cities retained their strictly local character. Ultimately, the reasons for their success remain enigmatic, but it appears that the cults were transmitted through pre-existing networks that facilitated their proliferation. The agents that carried their worship were different, however. Atargatis/Dea Syria retained a strong national character and was popular especially among Syrians, both in Syria and in the diaspora. The success of Jupiter Dolichenus, on the other hand, was fostered by a remarkable popularity among soldiers. His universal character, his close association with the well-being of the Roman state, and, more generally, the appropriation of imperial modes of representation (both visual and linguistic), must be seen as the main factors behind his wide acceptance among non-Syrians (Dészpa 2017). The official seals of the city of Doliche, which show Roman emperors shaking hands with Jupiter Dolichenus or an emperor sacrificing before the god suggest that the notion of a special bond between Jupiter Dolichenus and the Roman state and the transition from a local to a universal deity was conceived in Doliche (fig. 39.7). Yet, the role of the home sanctuaries for worship in the diaspora needs further elucidation.

FIGURE 39.7. Seal impression with an emperor sacrificing in front of Jupiter Dolichenus, Doliche, burnt clay, 25 × 21 mm. © Forschungsstelle Asia Minor.

Acknowledgments

Research for this article was funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF 119).

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CHAPTER 40

THE TETRAPOLIS REGIONCITIES AND CULTURE

CATHERINE SALIOU

The Greek word *tetrapolis* means "(being) four cities." It may apply to a group of four cities, or to a city divided into four parts. Contemporary historians of antiquity refer confidently to the Syrian Tetrapolis as designating a group of four cities located in the northwestern part of ancient Syria, and whose civic territories were adjacent, forming a geographical unit extending between the Mediterranean Sea and the western fringes of the Syrian steppe: Antioch, Seleucia, Laodicea, and Apamea. However, the use of the word Tetrapolis related to Syrian geography is attested only once, in Strabo's *Geography*, written at the beginning of the first century AD (Str. 16.2.4). According to Strabo, Tetrapolis is a name for Seleucis. But what is Seleucis? Undoubtedly the name refers to Seleucus and the Seleucid dynasty and realm, but the extent and limits of the territory thus designated are not clear. For Strabo, Seleucis extended to the east as far as Cyrrhus and to the south, along the coast, to the River Eleutherus. However, it was also called Tetrapolis because it included, among numerous other agglomerations, four important cities: Antioch "near Daphne," Seleucia "in Pieria," Laodicea, and Apamea. Strabo added that all four of these cities were founded by Seleucus I Nicator and "used to be called sisters, because of their accord with one another." The source used by Strabo in this passage must be the Apamean Posidonius, active in the first half of the first century BC.

This chapter is devoted to this group of four cities, but the reader needs to be aware that their designation, as a whole, as Tetrapolis, is a historiographical artifact. As we will see, however, the notion covered by this designation has to do with historical realities. Our goal is to explore the relationship between culture, urban space, and history by attempting an interconnected history of these four cities. The heterogeneity of the sources and overrepresentation of Antioch make this task difficult, but not impossible.

From Antigonus the One Eyed to the Last Seleucids

Northern Syria has a prestigious history going back to the Bronze Age, but by the time of Alexander's conquest, its golden age was seemingly over (for a balanced view, see Blömer 2020). A first wave of urbanization seems to have been undertaken by Antigonus the One Eyed, one of Alexander's successors. He founded Antigonia, which must have been located near the Amuq Lake, and was his residence from 306 to 302 (Cohen 2006, 76–79). He was also most probably the founder, on the site of the future Apamea, of a locality named Pella (Cohen 2006, 121–124). This was the name of a prestigious city in Macedonia. It exemplifies a huge process of toponymical appropriation of the landscape by soldiers and colonists coming from Macedonia and Greece. In the same process, the country around the future Seleucia was given the name of Pieria, like a Macedonian region, and the River Orontes was sometimes called Axios, by reference to a Macedonian river. According to Strabo (*Geog*. 16.2.8), the ancient name of Seleucia had been *Hydatos Potamoi*, "Rivers of Water." This locality, which was maybe also

named *Potamoi Karon*, "Rivers of the Carians" (Diod. Sic. 19.79.6), had probably also been founded by the same Antigonus.

Antigonus was defeated by Seleucus in 301 bc. His kingdom, covering most of Asia Minor and Syria, fell into the hands of the victor. At this time, Seleucus already reigned over a huge territory extending across Mesopotamia and Iran. This new acquisition implied reorganization. Seleucus was the real founder of what we call the Syrian Tetrapolis: four cities forming a system. All four of these cities bear dynastic names: Seleucia was named after Seleucus himself, Antioch after his father or his son (this issue would be much debated in the fourth century ad), Laodicea after his mother, and Apamea after his wife. The project was accomplished very quickly during the year 300. The aim was to connect the Mediterranean region that had been taken from Antigonus with the heart of the Seleucid kingdom, and to stabilize the geographical organization of the kingdom as a whole. The land around the four cities was fertile and able to feed a large population. The creation of the Seleucia and Laodicea harbors improved the maritime and commercial connections between Inner Syria and the Mediterranean world, and must have involved impressive works. Antioch and Apamea controlled the Orontes. Army horses and elephants could be bred around the latter (Str. 16.2.10). Seleucus transferred the population of Antigonia to Seleucia and Antioch. The political meaning of such an act is obvious. As we have seen, the Macedonian names given to elements of the landscape and various cities resulted in the construction of a "metaphorical Macedonia." In this context the choice of dynastic names for the "sister cities" of Tetrapolis conveyed a specific message: the Syrian land was not only appropriated by the newcomers, but more specifically by the new dynasty (Capdetrey 2007, 59–72). Three of the new cities stood along the Orontes (Apamea, Antioch) or not far from its estuary (Seleucia). They thus shared legends related to the river and its geographical setting, some at least being inherited from a more ancient past (Gatier in Parayre 2016, 249–269; Ogden 2017, 117–134).

We know very little regarding the urbanism of the four cities at their birth. Their plan, as it is perceptible through archaeological exploration at Apamea, or through the observation of the contemporary urban fabric at Laodicea and Antioch, was organized in an orthogonal way, with straight streets defining modular blocks (Sauvaget 1934). It is commonly accepted that the implementation of such a plan dates back to the time of the foundation. Whether that was the case or whether it was in fact a little later, this plan determined the subsequent evolution of urban space and, at least in part, mental representations and administrative and fiscal organization until the Roman period: in Antioch in ad 73–74, the blocks were called *plintheia* and each of them bore a specific name (*SEG* XXXV, 1483). Regarding the civic organization of the cities at the time of their foundation, it is worth noting that in Laodicea in 175 bc the members of the civic council were named the "Peliganes" (Yon and Aliquot 2016, no. 382). This Macedonian word was inherited from the time of the foundation. Its use, however, is also attested in Seleucia on the Tigris, Babylon, and Susa. For the Laodiceans, in the second century bc, it may have been more an indication of a Seleucid rather than a Macedonian identity. Things might have been different at the time of the foundation.

There is some evidence that Seleucia was planned to be the most important of the four cities: it bore the name of Seleucus himself, and the founder of the dynasty was buried there. However, Antioch grew up quickly, and in the first part of the third century, it began to extend outside its initial limits (Str. 16.2.4). In this period, the Seleucid court was moving from one city to another in the huge Seleucid Empire. As a consequence, the presence of an artist "at court" doesn't imply that he actually worked in one or another city in northern Syria. There is a significant exception: the sculptor Eutychides from Sycion (near Corinth), a former student of Lysippus, carved a bronze statue of a woman personifying Antioch, seated on the rocky mountain rising above the Orontes, which is personified as a young swimmer at her feet. The

original piece (now lost) was made between 300 and 270, probably during the reign of Antiochus I (281–261). The uniqueness of this creation testifies to the uniqueness of the city in the eyes of this king (Meyer 2006, 174–175). From the second century onward a cult of the "Fortune of the city" appeared in some cities: this "Fortune" is a personification of the city and simultaneously a divinity that guarantees its prosperity. In this new religious context, Eutychides's Antioch became Antioch's Fortune (Meyer 2006, 333–377). This figure remained the symbol of the city until the end of antiquity. In 246 the Lagid king Ptolemy III invaded Syria, and conquered Seleucia. The city remained part of the Lagid Empire until 219. The loss of Seleucia seems to have given more importance to Antioch. Strabo mentions a new extension of the city wall during the reign of Seleucus Callinicus (246–226). This loss must also have benefited Laodicea, which during this period remained the only large Mediterranean harbor in the Seleucid Near East.

The reign of Antiochus III (223–187) was a turning point not only for the global history of the Mediterranean world but also for the urban history of northern Syria. One of his first achievements was the reconquest of Seleucia. As a consequence of the conquest of the southern Levant (200 bc) and the loss of the Anatolian possessions (189 bc) the heart of the kingdom was firmly established in Syria, and more precisely in Antioch. The indications of the written sources converge to testify to significant urban growth of Antioch between Antiochus III and Antiochus IV (175–164), roughly between 200 and 160 bc (Str. 16.2.4; Lib., *Or*. 11.119; Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 8.21). The city was now definitely the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the king, and the court played the role of an intellectual center. The glory of the nearby Apollo's sanctuary at Daphne increased also at this time. The most important of the writers and artists living around Antiochus III was Euphorion of Chalcis, one of the greatest poets of the Hellenistic period. According to a later biographical notice preserved in a Byzantine compilation (*Suda*, *s.u.*), Antiochus appointed him to supervise the "public library." This anachronistic wording refers obviously to a "royal library," on the model of the "Great Library" founded by the Ptolemies in Alexandria. When he died, Euphorion was buried either in Antioch or in Apamea: we can't exclude the possibility that this library was in Apamea. During the reign of Demetrios I (161–150), Philonides the Laodicean, who was a geometer and an epicurean philosopher, and had studied in Pergamon and Athens, organized a school in a house given to him by the king near his palace (for each philosopher cited in this essay, see Goulet and Hadot 1989–2018, *s.u.*).

FIGURE 40.1. Bronze coin, reverse. Inscription "of brother peoples," thunderbolt. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques, AA.GR.1118 (source: gallica.bnf.fr/BnF).

From the death of Antiochus III onward, the power of Rome became ever more tangible, and after the middle of the second century, the Seleucid kingdom began to dissolve. Between 149 and 146, coins minted in Seleucia to be used both in Seleucia and Antioch bore the mention "of *adelphoi demoi*" (fig. 40.1, cf. Cohen 2006, 90, 132–133). The word *demoi* means here "people" as "civic community." The word *adelphoi* ("brothers") qualifies cities that have the same founder, or whose founders are brothers. A century and half after their foundation, it is the first attested manifestation of the consciousness of a common origin between two cities of what we call Tetrapolis. However, their relationship in the next decades is more one of rivalry. Seleucia was granted the titles "sacred and inviolable" around 140 and autonomy in 108, but in 92 Antioch gained an unprecedented title, "metropolis," which asserted its primacy as the royal seat (Rigsby 2020). Around this time one of the most important philosophers of the Hellenistic

period, Posidonius, was born in Apamea. However, he left his city, lived in Athens and Rhodes, traveled in the West, and died in Rome in 51 bc. He is part of the cultural history of the Roman world more than of the so-called Tetrapolis—although he may have been its inventor. In any case we can assume that Strabo borrowed from him the use of the word to refer to northern Syria, and it is not possible to trace back this use before him.

In 83 bc, or more likely around 74 bc (Hoover 2007, 296–297), the Armenian king Tigranes invaded the whole of Syria. Each city had to make its own choices: in contrast to Antioch, Laodicea, and Apamea, Seleucia opposed Tigranes. When the Roman Pompey entered the former Seleucid kingdom and created the Roman province of Syria in 64 bc, he made Seleucia a "free city" to reward it for its resistance (Str. 16.2.8; Eutr. 6.14.2). However, Antioch remained the capital of the new province. After his victory over Pompey, Julius Caesar came to Syria. To honor him, Laodicea and Antioch decided to count the years according to a "Caesarian era," beginning in 49 bc for Antioch and in 48 bc for Laodicea. Moreover, Laodicea became officially "Julia Laodicea." The next years were chaotic, and the Tetrapolis became a battlefield between Romans: a Pompeian occupied Apamea; one of Caesar's murderers seized Antioch and besieged Laodicea. Fifteen years later, the victory of Octavian and the end of the civil wars stabilized the country and marked the beginning of a new period (Sartre 2001, 441–468).

High Empire

In imperial Syria, each of the four cities maintained its own functions and characters.

Antioch was one of the biggest cities in the Roman world. It occupied the third rank after Rome and Alexandria (Jos., *BI* 3.19). It was the place where the governors of the province lived and the center of Roman power in the Near East. Moreover, it was also a center of the provincial imperial cult (*SEG* VII, 847; *SEG* LII, 1553).

At Seleucia, under the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, on imperial order, an impressive water diversion system was dug into the rock by the army, in order to divert the floodwaters running down the mountain and threatening the port. Seleucia became indeed a military harbor. The garrisoning of a Roman military fleet there is attested from the beginning of the second century onward. The Roman imperial power also took care of the navigability of the Orontes between Seleucia and Antioch: in the context of the Parthian wars of Trajan and Lucius Verus, the logistical role played by Seleucia, the Orontes, and Antioch, connected to the Euphrates through northern Syria, was essential (Van Berchem 1985; Aliquot in Parayre 2016, 215–228).

Apamea seems to have been above all an economic center at the interface between the Orontes Valley, the fertile mountains of the "Massif Calcaire," and the Syrian steppe. A census in ad 6 counted 117,000 members of the Apamean civic community in the vast territory of the city. This figure probably only concerned men (*CIL* III, 6687). It implies an important population. By the middle of the first century the city took the name of Claudia Apamea, which means that it must have been favored by the emperor Claudius. In the third century the city took on a military role again by hosting a Roman legion (Balty 1988).

Laodicea was the most important harbor in northern Syria. According to Strabo, Laodicea "provides the Alexandrians with most of their wine" (16.2.9). Its geographical situation made it the best route for the products of the hinterland, including the Apamean and part of the Antiochean territories. Its prominent commercial function wasn't contradictory to a military role, attested by some inscriptions and by the title "navarchis" ("admiral") which honored it in the reign of Hadrian (Rey-Coquais 1994).

Its importance led Laodicea to compete with Antioch.

Rivalry between cities was a major phenomenon in the provincial life of the Roman Empire, and must be taken seriously. Competition easily turned to hate. Some dissent is noted between Antioch and Apamea (Dion Chrys., *Or.* 34.48), but "hate" is the word used in the third century by Herodian to describe the relationship between Laodicea and Antioch (Hdn. 3.3.3). Their rivalry manifested itself in a spectacular manner during the years following Commodus's death on 31 December 192. Pescennius Niger stood in Antioch as governor of the province of Syria. As he decided to compete with Septimius Severus for the imperial power, Antiocheans supported him enthusiastically. Laodiceans did the opposite. After Septimius Severus defeated Pescennius Niger in 194, he decided to deprive Antioch of its civic rank, reducing it to a "village" dependent on Laodicea, and joining its territory to Laodicea's territory. Moreover, as he decided to split the former province of Syria by creating two provinces, the Syria Phoenice to the south (capital Tyre), and the Syria Coele to the north, Laodicea became the first capital of the new province of Syria Coele. The victory over Antioch seemed to be complete. Soon after, however, Antioch regained its civic status and function as a provincial capital. Maybe as compensation, in 198 Laodicea became a Roman colony, which was an honor, with the *ius Italicum* that conferred fiscal advantages. Some years later, around 215, Antioch in turn became a Roman colony. Caracalla granted other gifts to Laodicea. The rivalry between the two cities forced the emperor to balance their favors (Ziegler 1978).

After these events, however, Antioch remained one of the most important cities in the Roman world, far ahead of Laodicea. After the Sassanid dynasty came to power, the history of the third century was dominated in the East by the antagonistic relationship between the Roman and Persian Empires. Antioch, Apamea, and Seleucia were raided by Sapor II around 260. In the context of continuous wars against the oriental power, the role of Antioch as headquarters of the imperial military force grew. During these years began the building of an imperial palace, linked with the planning of an entire part of the city implanted on an island of the Orontes, which would be called the "New" (City) in the fourth century (Saliou 2009). Antioch was not only a provincial capital; it also became a potential imperial capital.

During these three centuries, the cultural life and urban fabric of the four cities evolved.

The colonnaded street may have been born in Antioch between the end of the first century bc and the first century ad (Burns 2017, 121–132). A colonnaded street is one with porticoes (rows of columns supporting a roof) extending along it. These porticoes unify the visual perception of the street and provide a sheltered space between the roadway and the buildings. This space accommodates pedestrians but also various activities. Colonnaded streets are main streets: their appearance implies not only a change in the urban way of life, but also induces or expresses a hierarchy of the street network. The notion of an "invention" of an urban form is of course debatable: it is more a question of evolution. Moreover, the written sources and archaeological data regarding the chronology of the apparition of the porticoes along the streets of Antioch are not clear. But it is certain that at the end of the first century AD, the existence of a lengthy "main street" adorned with porticoes was the main feature of the Antiochean urban space. At Apamea the colonnaded street built during the second century AD impressed tourists right up until recently (fig. 40.2). Such streets organized and unified the urban landscape, and structured urban life. They are essential components of urban culture.

FIGURE 40.2. Apamea, a view on the main, colonnaded street (© C. Saliou, 1992).

The urban culture of the cities of northern Syria had many shared features within the community of the cities of the (Eastern) Roman world, and the rivalry between Laodicea and Antioch is an aspect of this common civic culture. Greek contests (*agones*) were widespread in the imperial period. They are attested in Antioch already in the first century ad (e.g., *SEG* XIV, 613), and in Apamea under Hadrian (*SEG* LVI, 1539). In Laodicea the *Soteria Capetolia* had been created (or renovated) by Septimius Severus (*SEG* LIV, 724), and the *Antoni(ni)ana Pythia* were founded around 215 (*IGLS* IV, 1265), in the context of the complex relationship between emperors, Antioch, and Laodicea, described earlier. The date of the creation of the Antiochean *Olympia* is still debated. What is certain is that, as the most important part of the competition took place in Daphne, it must have led to some evolution in the relationship between Antioch and Daphne, and in the religious identity of the latter locality: it remained the site of a prestigious Apollo's sanctuary, but Zeus's cult became at least as important in its identity.

Another component of the Roman way of life was the use of hot collective baths. By the beginning of the second century ad, such Roman baths had become not only places of wellness and body care, but also places of sociability and for the display of artworks. A bath built after the 115 earthquake in Apamaea included a basilica (hall used as a meeting space, for administrative or judicial activities, business or leisure). It was also adorned with two bronze groups figuring Theseus and the Minotaur, and Apollo and Marsyas (*SEG* LII, 1552–1553). Moreover, the bath building faced the colonnaded street and included its own portico. Such baths were prominent elements in the urban landscape. Therefore, they were also places of expression of the links between the imperial power and the cities, either by being built with an imperial grant or by being dedicated to an emperor. In both cases they could be named after

an emperor. In Antioch, the Hadrianic bath hosted at least once, in the third century, the assizes of the governor: so baths could be places of power (Saliou 2014a).

The inhabitants of Antioch and Apamea at least—but it must be also true for Laodicea and Seleucia—were also fond of theater. Theater buildings are attested through archaeology or texts in Antioch, Daphne, Apamea, and Laodicea. The two principal types of theatrical performances were "pantomime" (dance) and "mime" (dramatic representation). Inscriptions found in Apamea honoring dancers show the importance of the role played in urban societies by such artists. The Antiocheans' taste for dance and their critical faculties and competence are pointed out by Lucian (*Salt.* 76).

Private space was the context for literary work and for the development of philosophical and religious schools. A philosophical tradition seems to have begun in Apamea, in the middle of the second century, with the neopythagorean philosopher Numenius, who was born in the city. Slightly later, a certain Aurelius Belius Philippus was the head of an epicurean philosophical school. Oppianus was not a philosopher, but a poet, who dedicated his *Cynegetica* to Caracalla. In his poem he relates the legend of the origin of the lake near Apamea. This story goes back to the Macedonian conquerors' perception of the close similarity between the geographical situation of the Syrian Apamea, previously called Pella, and the Macedonian Pella. Around 270 an Etrurian named Amelius, who had studied under Plotinus in Rome, and who admired Numenius's works, moved to Apamea. Twenty years later, Iamblichus of Chalcis, who had also studied in Rome, decided to stay in Apamea. There he found a patron, Sopater, a member of one of the greatest local families. He opened a school that was visited by numerous disciples, some coming from Cappadocia or even Greece.

But at his death around 325, times were changing. The rise of Christianity began. However, this rise had been prepared for centuries in Antioch. The Antiochean church claims an apostolic origin, and the word "Christian" entered into use for the first time in Antioch (Acts 11:26). An Antiochean tradition of theological thought is attested since the second century (Ignatius of Antioch), and, around the middle of the third century at the latest, Christianity was perceptible in the urban landscape through at least one church (Mayer and Allen 2012, 128–130).

Constantius's victory over Licinius in 324 may be used as a landmark for the beginning of a new period: late antiquity.

Late Antiquity

From the time of a major administrative reform that took place in 313–314, the provinces of the Roman Empire were gathered into "dioceses." The diocese of the East included all the Levant and, until ca. 381, the Egyptian provinces. Antioch was naturally the capital of this diocese. Consequently, the bishop of Antioch had primacy over all the bishops of the diocese. Moreover, between 337 and 378, emperors sojourned frequently and lengthily in Antioch, which played the role of an imperial capital (fig. 40.3).

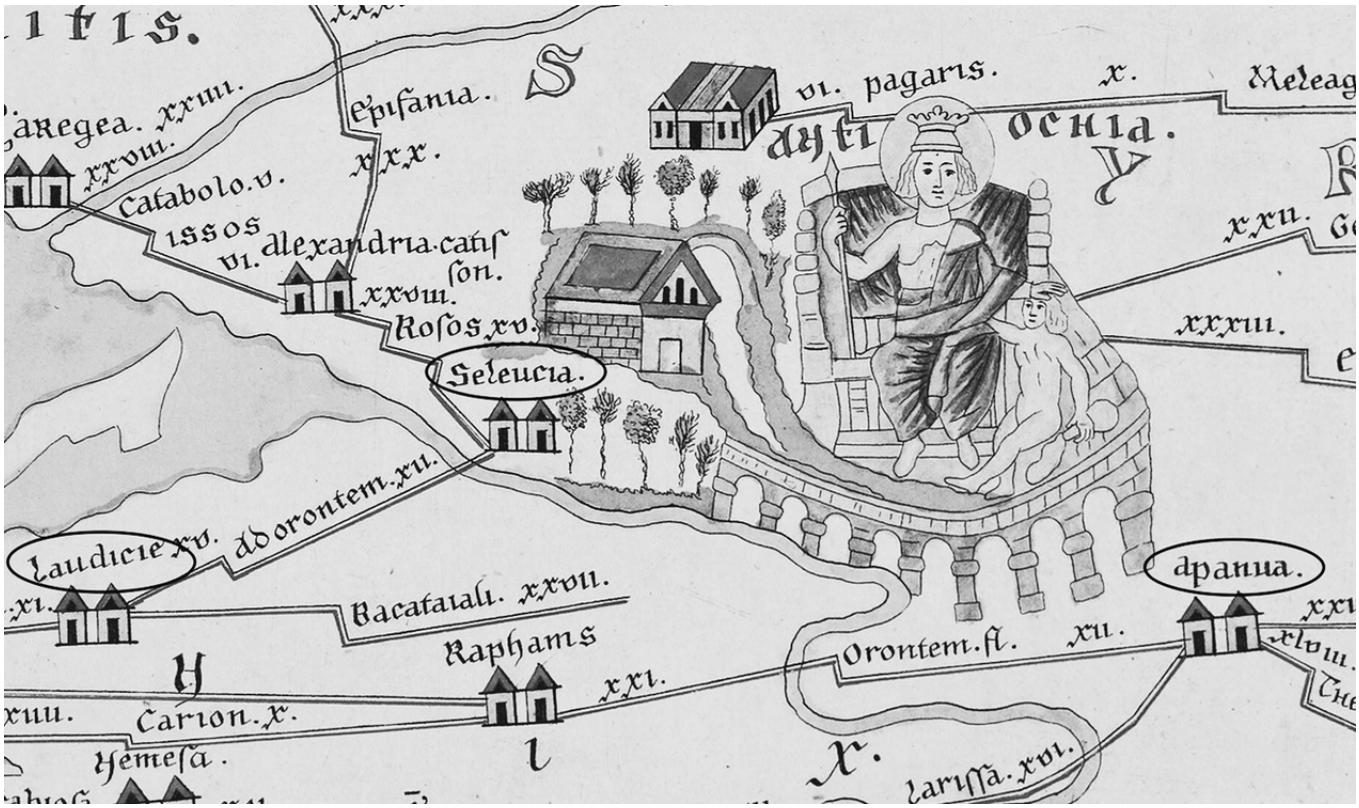

FIGURE 40.3. The *Tabula Peutingeriana* (fourth century; facsimile F. Chr. Scheyb, 1753), extract. Antioch is represented with the same importance as Rome and Constantinople. Its prominence among Laodiceia, Apamea, and Seleucia (circled) is clearly marked (source: gallica.bnf.fr/BnF).

Constantius II (337–361) adorned Antioch with numerous buildings, so much so that the city, according to Emperor Julian, is supposed to have taken the name of its benefactor (Julian., *Or.* 1.33). One great achievement was the completion and dedication of the "Golden Church," begun during the reign of his father (Saliou 2014b). This building must have been a Christian landmark in the urban space. Meanwhile a process of erasure of the traditional religions began, with degradation or destruction of some temples (cf. e.g., Lib., *ep.* 724). Constantius also ordered important works in the harbor of Seleucia (cf. e.g., Lib., *Or.* 11.263). Imperial solicitude extended to Laodicea, to which Constantius offered, according to an inscription, an "outstanding building" and the honor of bearing his name, like Antioch indeed (Aliquot 2010). According to a compendium of economic geography, written at the end of Constantius's reign, Antioch is without any doubt first among the Near Eastern cities. Laodicea comes after Tyre, Berytus, and Caesarea Maritima. It is praised for its commercial activity and for its role in the provision of supplies for the army. The author mentions also the important work done at Seleucia harbor, but Seleucia itself is presented as a satellite town of Antioch (*Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 23–32).

Apamea's absence is all the more surprising as a few years later, Emperor Julian (361–363), staying in Antioch, had to judge a precedence quarrel between Laodicea and Apamea. The ranking of the cities was an important matter. Laodicea and Apamea competed for the second rank in Syria and Julian awarded this to Apamea. Laodiceans put forward the beauty of their city, due to its being beside the sea, and the wisdom of one of their citizens, in all probability their bishop Apollinarius, but Julian preferred to honor Apamea for its philosophical (i.e., pagan) tradition and the hospitality manifested toward philosophers coming from elsewhere (Lib., *Or.* 18.187). Around 385, Ammianus Marcellinus, listing the Syrian cities, cited first

Antioch, second Laodicea and Apamea, after them Seleucia, and no others (Amm. Marc. 14.8.8).

During Valens's reign (364–378), Antioch became again an imperial residence. Valens built the last Antiochean imperial bath. According to a later source, a civic center formed by a Caesareum and Olympic facilities was made into an imperial forum including a senate. This refurbishing underlined the strength of the relationship between the city and the imperial power (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 13.30). After Valens's death, however, this relationship waned: Theodosius I (379–395) didn't ever come to Antioch.

Traditional entertainment inherited from preceding centuries remained popular (Casella 2007). The Olympic contest took place in Antiochia and Daphne every four years. *Olympia* were celebrated in Apamea in 361 and Pythia in Laodicea in 363 (Feissel 2010), and there is no reason to doubt that they were organized regularly every four years. Hunting games were organized in Antioch on the occasion of the "games of the syriarch," inherited from the ceremonies of the provincial imperial cult. Such shows were extremely expensive, implied heavy logistics, and needed imperial support. It was also possible to enjoy them in other contexts: a hunting game was organized in 361 or 362 in Laodicea. However, horse racing was probably much more common, and was extremely popular among all classes of society. The theater remained vibrant.

Rhetoric and its teaching were an important component of cultural and intellectual life in Antioch as in other cities. The most famous sophist of the fourth century, Libanius, born in Antioch in 314, began to teach there in 354 and did so until his death after 393 (Cribiore 2007). His preserved work is immense. Speeches and letters inform us about political events and social realities. He is also a good representative of the common culture of the urban elites of the late antique Roman East. In 356 he pronounced a speech *In Praise of Antioch* (*Or.* 11) in which he displayed his own mastery of the standards and traditions of the praise of cities, but also exposed main features of Antiochean identity, among them a prestigious mythological and Macedonian past, allowance to enjoy the *truphe* (luxury or well-being), the presence of an imperial palace, abundance of baths, and an urban landscape organized by a colonnaded street running parallel to the Orontes, with porticoes safeguarding the benefits of social life. Seleucia is presented in a subordinate position as the harbor of Antioch, and there is no mention of Laodicea or Apamea. Emperor Julian himself wrote some of his works in Antioch. Among them, the *Misopogon* is a pamphlet against the Antiocheans, written before his departure to fight the Persians and, according to a later source, displayed near the entrance of the palace (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 3.19). The *Misopogon* can be read as a response to Libanius's speech *In Praise of Antioch* (Marcone 1984). Julian pointed out the contemporary lack of piety toward the traditional gods, whereas Libanius stressed the role played by these gods in the past history of the city. In addition, Julian picked some of the main themes upon which Antiochean identity was founded, according to Libanius, and turned them against the Antiocheans: the Seleucid past, the *truphe* as characteristic of urban life, and even the colonnaded street.

Meanwhile Christians were debating. In Antioch, these debates involved the whole urban space, inasmuch as each congregation competed for the churches. Moreover, during Valens's reign, some Nicaeans, who were banned from churches, gathered in the open air (Mayer and Allen 2012, 51–52). John, later called Chrysostomus, was born ca. 344 in Antioch. When he became a priest, Nicaean orthodoxy had triumphed. John was one of the best orators of his time. His speeches were homilies. His main task as a priest was to unify the Christian congregation and to remove it once and for all from heresy, Judaism, or "paganism." To achieve this objective, he sought to design what we may call a Christian mental map of Antioch, demarcating clearly spaces appropriate for Christians and spaces forbidden to them (Shepardson 2014, 92–128).

In 387, during a riot, statues of the imperial family were knocked down. It was a crime and Antioch was punished: it lost its civic status and became again, for a few months, a "village" dependent on Laodicea. This event gave Christian bishops and monks, on the one hand, and Libanius, on the other hand, an opportunity to compete in asking Theodosius for mercy in the name of Antioch (Downey 1961, 425–431). During the period of fear and humiliation after the riot, John pronounced homilies to comfort his congregation. In them he explained that he was delighted by the present state of the city, which at last looked like a Christian city and no longer a pagan one. By contrasting the two Antiochs, the pagan and the Christian, he took again Libanius's themes in *In Praise of Antioch*: the city's past, its rank of capital, baths, porticoes, etc. (Ioh. Chrys., *Hom*. 17 *ad populum Antiochenum*). Once more, Antiochean identity was at stake.

At the time of Theodosius's death, the Roman Empire was divided into two parts. The emperor of the eastern part resided now permanently in Constantinople, and Antioch couldn't claim to have imperial status anymore. At the beginning of the fifth century, the division of the province of Syria Coele into Syria Prima and Syria Salutaris allowed Apamea to acquire the status of a provincial capital and gave impetus to its development and wealth (Balty 1980). By contrast, the creation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 451 caused a loss of power and prestige for the Patriarchate of Antioch.

During the fourth century, Antioch had grown and this growth may have continued until the beginning of the fifth century. Under Theodosius II (408–450) it was necessary to extend the city wall (Brands 2016, 30–37). The empress Eudocia, Theodosius's wife, paid a visit to the city. She made a speech before the city council, and began by asserting her common origin, as an Athenian, with the Antiocheans (Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.20). Indeed, as Libanius had explained, there were Athenians amongst Antigonia's inhabitants, transferred by Seleucus to Antioch (Lib., *Or*. 11.92). Since 356, the memory of the partly Athenian identity of the Antiocheans had not been lost. Intellectual life was continuing among theologians or through the teaching of rhetoric. Traditional entertainment was also continuing. *Olympia* ceased only in 520 (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 17.13). Baths were still components of the urban landscape and centers of urban social life. Moreover, they were places of memory ("lieux de mémoire") of the relationship between the city and the emperors. As such they were essential components of cultural memory (Saliou 2014a). Churches were now numerous, but building activity also included civic spaces and the adornment of the urban environment (e.g., Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.18, 3.28).

Two major earthquakes occurred in 526 and 528. Antioch, Laodicea, and Seleucia were affected (Downey 1961, 519–531). The renaming of Antioch marked an important symbolic break. This change seems to have occurred in two stages: a prior civic decision was officially approved by Justinian after the 528 earthquake (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 18.29). Henceforth Antioch was named Theoupolis. Thus the "city of Antiochus" had become "the city of God." The new name asserted the Christian character of the city and was intended to erase its "Greek" (pagan) identity.

Some years after Justinian created the little province of Theodorias, whose capital was Laodicea (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 18.39). The main rival of Antioch in Syria was a capital at last. At that time John Malalas wrote his *Chronographia*, in which Antioch and its monuments played an important role, to the point that it seemed possible to use it as a source for the history of Antiochean urban space. In fact, for all the time preceding the beginning of the reign of the emperor Zeno (ad 474), Malalas's stories should never be taken at face value (Saliou in Meier, R adtki, and Schulz 2016, 59–76). However, Malalas is really a fundamental source for the study of storytelling relating to urban space in late antiquity. Precisely Laodicea appears in the *Chronographia* in the same manner as Antioch, but much more discreetly. For instance,

according to Malalas, seven Antiochean baths bore the name of an emperor, but in Laodicea he knew only one or two baths linked to an imperial figure (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.22, 12.21). Thus, the construction of Malalas's narrative itself expresses the relationship between Antioch and Laodicea: an unequal rivalry. Moreover, the first and last detailed narrative of the quadruple foundation of the four cities of the Tetrapolis is to be found in Malalas (8.11–18). This narrative is based on ancient sources, but also on more recent traditions, not anterior to the beginning of the fourth century (Garstad 2005; see now Garstad 2022). In turn our modern notion of Tetrapolis is partly based on this narrative.

The four cities founded by Seleucus were "sisters" inasmuch as they had the same founder. However, they were more rivals than allies. Their complementarity was called into question by the occupation of Seleucia by the Lagids as early as the third century BC. Over time, Antioch established itself as capital and megalopolis. Laodicea and Apamea competed for the second rank in northern Syria. Seleucia was overshadowed by Antioch, its neighbor on the Orontes, and by its competitor as a harbor, Laodicea. The transformations of their urban landscape reflected the changing cultural and religious context, and the relationships between each of the four cities and the imperial power. In turn their urban landscape could be used as an argument in debates over their cultural and civic identity.

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CHAPTER 41

ANTIOCH ON THE ORONTES

The Urban Image

ANDREA U. DE GIORGI

Introduction

Antioch on the Orontes (modern Antakya, Hatay, Republic of Turkey) is central in the study of urbanism during the classical and post-classical ages. While its archaeological remains are rather modest, the literary output on the city is quite remarkable, and there is no shortage of accounts—especially late antique—that inform us about its genesis, rise to prominence, and putative downfall. Antioch offered onlookers a multitude of viewpoints: whether seen from the highlands or the sweep of the Plain of Antioch (Amik Ovası), from the imperial palace or the octagonal church, the city apparently shone in its splendor day and night. Overall, awe resonates throughout much ancient literature. In the early 1960s, Glanville Downey crafted a most remarkable narrative that marshaled these sources and covered the life span of the city; to date, his *History of Antioch* is a keystone in Antiochene studies as well as the most complete repository for textual inquiries (Downey 1961).

For all their significance, however, the literary accounts on Antioch are inflected by the conventions of the city as a marvel with no match. In particular, recursive formulas such as "the pearl of the east," "the apex of the Oriens," and the like are fairly frequent in the literary repertoire of the fourth through sixth centuries. Behind them are the voices of Antioch's most prominent sons: Libanius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and John Malalas (Bergjan and Elm 2018). Other sources like the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, echoing the spirit of Aelius Aristides's *Praise of Rome*, attest to the wide circulation of this trope: "prima civitas regalis et bona in omnibus …; civitas splendida et operibus publicis eminens, et multitudinem populorum (undique) accipiens, omnes sustinet; abundans omnibus bonis." Likewise, other chronicles simply styled Antioch as the "beautiful," Ἀντιοχέων δὲ τὴν καλήν (De Giorgi 2016, 7). Arguably, it was on these positive descriptions that an enduring rhetoric of Antioch as the splendid, sophisticated city of the East was built. Indeed, the modern reception of the city drew greatly on these characterizations, as if Antioch foreshadowed the spirit of imperial Vienna (Metzger 1948, 87). The 2000 seminal exhibit "Antioch, the Lost City" curated by Christine Kondoleon harnessed this same spirit in celebrating the city and its legacy (Kondoleon 2000; Becker and Kondoleon 2003). The beautiful mosaics of the Roman houses in Daphne excavated by the seminal 1930s Princeton excavations were central in this rhetoric (fig. 41.1). The stunning selection of artifacts, reunited for the first time since the 1930s were essential to assess the city's complicated archaeological record and to visualize its domestic architecture.

FIGURE 41.1. Constantinian Villa, Daphne: head of Dionysus panel (courtesy of the Antioch Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University).

The materiality of the city, however, remains to be investigated; destruction at the hands of nature and of man hinders the unveiling of Antioch's built environment. Twenty major earthquakes, in particular, struck Antioch between the first and the sixth centuries AD (Guidobon i 1994), often with serious consequences for the urban center, the Orontes basin, the level of the lake, and life in the region at large. Among these telluric events, two stand out for their devastating results: one that struck Antioch in AD 113 during Trajan's visit, an event that was impressively described by Cassius Dio (68.24.2.1), and the other in AD 526, that, according Procopius and Malalas, caused the death of between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants (Procop., *Bell*. 2.14.6; Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 420.5). Also, the Orontes River and the runoff of mountain streams have obliterated the northeastern swaths of the ancient city under an average 10 m of sediment. For example, the island, a discrete quarter first populated by Antiochus Epiphanes (215–164 BC) and which was later the seat of Diocletian's imperial palace, has been so overlaid with alluvial deposits that it is now fully incorporated into the river's eastern bank. Nevertheless, occasional glimpses of buildings and scattered remains on the highlands of Mount Silpius and Mount Staurin enable interpretative frameworks. The chapter examines how new datasets and research move forward the discourse of the city and its habitus.

The Hellenistic Period

The implementation of a solid network of cities and territories was the main concern of the Seleucid dynasty since the beginning of the third century BC (Grainger 1990, 66–87). Urban foci that acted as bulwarks as well as political milieus were crucial to the administration of a hardly tenable territory that spanned from Asia Minor to Bactria (De Giorgi and Eger 2021, 15–17). All in all, this ambitious urban program was probably even greater than that of Alexander, and entailed the foundation of several new cities, among which were sixteen Antiochs, five Laodiceas, nine Seleukeias, three Apameas, to name but a few (App., *Syr*. 57). Whether the foundation of all of these cities can be attributed to Seleucus Nicator alone is an argument that, because of the lack of textual sources, can hardly be challenged; it seems likely that Appian exaggerates his point, not reckoning with Antiochus I and successors' urbanizing plans. A great deal of the early third-century BC colonization activity took place in Syrian territory because of its crucial position between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. The foundation of the Tetrapolis, a consortium of four cities that comprised Antioch, Seleukeia, Laodicea, and Apamaea, must thus be viewed in these strategic terms, as it was essentially an expedient for maintaining a strong military presence and control over the main commercial arteries of the Levant (Jer., *Chron.* 1715; Ogden 2017). More fundamentally, the defeat of Antigonos and the destruction of Antigoneia sanctioned the establishment of Antioch on the Orontes. Strabo infers that the new city was conceived as a compound of four boroughs, each accommodating a specific community (16.2. 4), with a fourth sector, that of Epiphaneia, added later on by Antiochus IV. Thus, one sector served settlers from Antigoneia, another was home to the Euboeans, and there was one for the original inhabitants, predominantly Aramaic-speaking Syrians. In spatial terms, the new foundation occupied the small swath of land left as the River Orontes encroaches upon Mount Silpius. Overall, Antioch's location was completely ill suited; hemmed between the river and the slopes of Mount Silpius and Mount Staurin, from the

beginning the city had to reckon with conspicuous runoff from the massifs (the Parmenius and Phirminus streams) and the Orontes's propensity to flood. That Antioch occupied essentially the northern tract of what later became the "Roman city" is a hypothesis that has been put forth by modern scholarship. Also, whether Antioch was encircled by a perimeter of defenses at this early stage needs to be verified (Brands 2016). Stretches of polygonal walls on the slopes of Mount Staurin reveal the existence of an early system of fortifications. The iconic Tyche of Antioch, a sculpture by the hand of Eutychides of Sykion showing the divine fortune of the city with turreted crown, a sheaf of grain, and the personified Orontes, was commissioned by Seleucus in the early days of the foundation and went on to become the blueprint for the "Tyche" type in the following centuries (fig. 41.2).

FIGURE 41.2. The Tyche of Eutychides, bronze copy, first–second centuries **AD** (courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery, public domain).

The growth of Antioch began around the end of the third century BC, when the island on the Orontes and the slopes of Mount Silpius were integrated into the urban grid, likely in response to the number of new settlers and veteran soldiers that the city continued to receive. Traces of defensive walls identified by the 1930s excavators suggest that the island was girded by a perimeter of defenses at this juncture. The island thus became the "new city," a milieu that in the ages to come was to accommodate the hippodrome, the stadium, the imperial palace, a now heavily weathered temple, and then presumably the great church of Constantine (fig. 41.3).

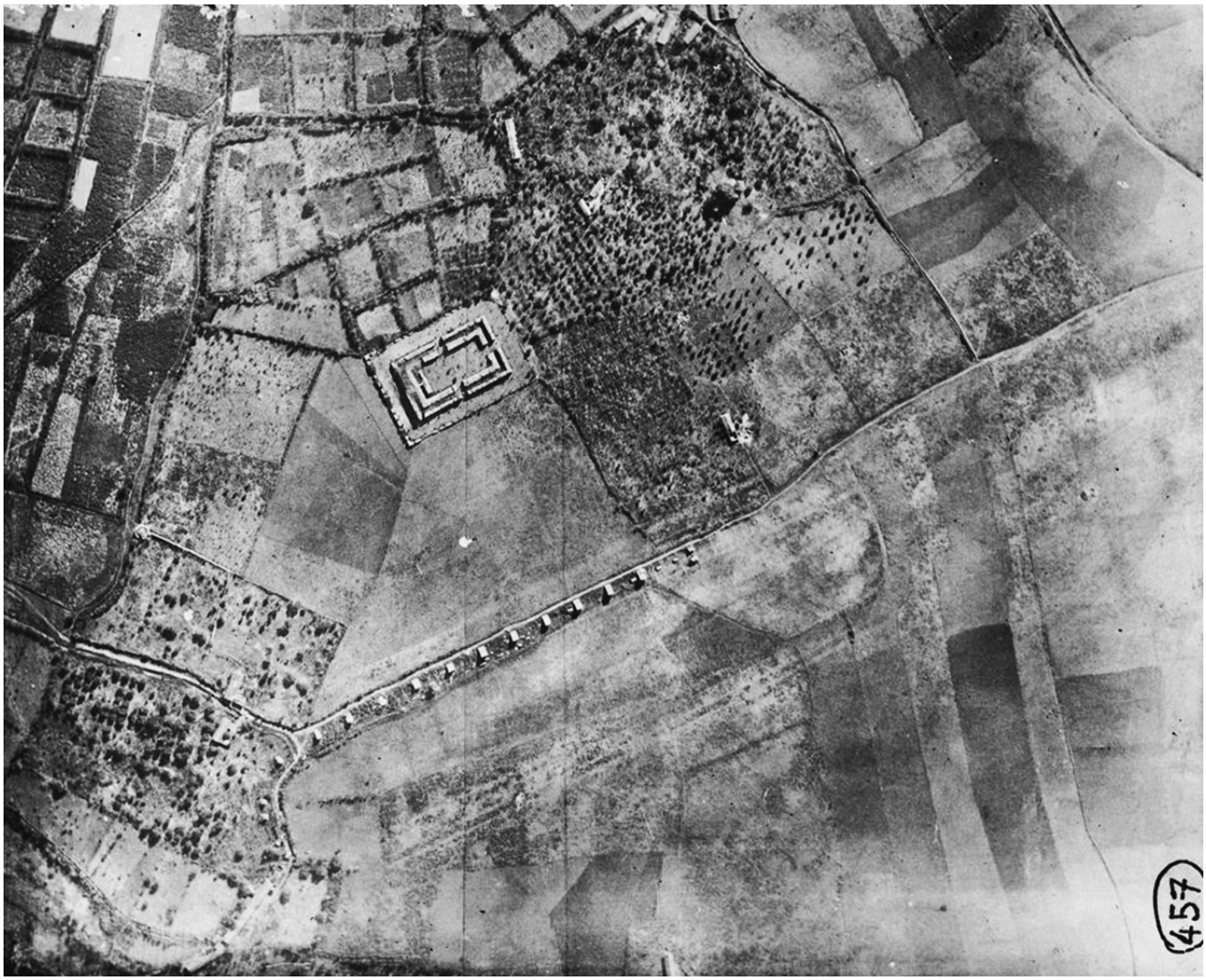

FIGURE 41.3. 1932 aerial photo of circus and temple area on the island of Antioch (courtesy of the Antioch Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University).

This modification represented a watershed in the history of Antioch's physical evolution: on the one hand, it added a new focus to the city plan, one that demanded the extension of the city's routes and the building of bridges. On the other hand, the new development spurred the dialectic between new and old city, which in all likelihood became the one distinction with

which the city was experienced by its actors. Presumably at this time, Antioch's main thoroughfare was monumentalized for the first time. This avenue, measuring approximately 7.20 m in width, would have sustained the armature of the Seleucid city; it created a grid with blocks measuring on average 112 × 58 m. It is fair to say that Antioch grew along this axis, as it not only connected the various boroughs but also linked the city to the Mediterranean and central Syria. Its modern reincarnation, Kurtuluş Caddesi, partially follows its trajectory. More to the point, this boulevard was the venue that in the successive centuries best captured the essence of the Antiochene spirit as it dealt with the realities of power of the day: riots, acclamations, food distributions, and funeral parades are episodes that unfolded on this vey axis and signified the most momentous junctures in the history of the city. Further, the Seleucid king saw to the heightening of Antioch's intellectual profile, as if it were in a contest with Alexandria. Boasting a library, Mouseion, Tychaion, and of course, a great sanctuary dedicated to Apollo at Daphne (Harbye, 6 km south of Antakya), Antioch was at this point aligned with the great Greek cities of the east.

Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 bc), however, some decisive changes occurred. The quarter of Epiphaneia (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 205.14–19) was added to the city, thus modifying the overall urban layout that would remain basically unchanged for the rest of antiquity (Jones 1998, 248). Geophysical survey and physical remains suggest that Epiphaneia may have been located on a saddle between Mount Silpius and Mount Staurin, on flat, level ground that was connected to the city below via a network of roads and trails (Brands 2016). Stretches of walls and water infrastructure make it plain that an ancient settlement nucleated and grew on these highlands. A new square was also central in this development, which might correspond to the tetragonal agora that was later to become the stage for the disorders of ad 69 (Jos., *BI* 7.55). Furthermore, an aqueduct tapping water from the Phirminus stream to the south was added at this time, providing Antioch with a continuous supply of fresh water. This undertaking was carried out by the Roman architect Cossutius, later praised by Vitruvius in his treatise; a "Cossutius" appears on graffiti recovered by the early excavators of Antioch (Stillwell 1938, 160–161). Attention to waterworks and methods of offsetting the effects of runoff seemingly began at this time, with the monumental channeling of the Parmenius's waters. On a different note, Antiochus IV also commissioned the construction of the *Charonion* bust, an apotropaic monumental group defending the city from an explosion of plague. Though heavily weathered, it is still visible today (fig. 41.4).

FIGURE 41.4. The Charonion (photo taken by Andrea U. De Giorgi).

In summary, by the mid-second century BC Antioch, seat of a satrapy (Str. 16.2.4), had outgrown every other city in the area and, as base of the royal court, became one of the most prominent cities of the kingdom (Grainger 1990, 125). During the civil wars and strife that occurred in the late second century BC, when the kingdom was essentially reduced to Syria and Phoenicia, possession of Antioch was key for a ruler to lay his claim and be recognized as the legitimate Seleucid king (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 7–38). As for the administrative aspect, two inscriptions illustrate the presence of a board of magistrates, priests, city council, as well as authorities appointed for religious festivals and games (Austin 1981, n. 220; Kraeling 1968, 178–179). Antioch had a democratic constitution, as attested by *isopoliteia* agreements contracted with the city of Teos in Asia Minor under Antiochus III and signed by the *demos* of Antioch (Herrmann 1965, 29–160).

The Roman Era

The mandate of Pompey in the East coincided with the eclipse of the Seleucid kingdom and the incorporation of Antioch and Syria within the Roman orbit. The transition went smoothly; evidently, very few pined over the end of the dynasty. Pompey was in Antioch in the spring of 64 BC in the wake of his military activities against the pirates of Cilicia and seized the

opportunity to easily overthrow the last of the Seleucid kings, Antiochus XIII Asiaticus, who was still ruling despite the destabilization of his comatose kingdom. By doing so, Pompey annexed Syria to Rome (Millar 1993, 27); Antioch enjoyed the status of free city, which, at the very least, enabled the community to retain its own political constitution, to eschew Roman garrisoning, and to be exempt from the payment of certain taxes. The putative addition of a circus under Q. Marcius Rex introduced the unfolding of ambitious building programs that modified the image and layout of the city. Antioch's status as capital and "free city" was reinforced by Caesar in 47 BC (Plin., *HN* 18.79; *Bell. Alex*. 65.4; Downey 1961, 152). According to John Malalas, Caesar confirmed Antioch's autonomy through an edict in which he referred to the city as "metropolis, sacred, inviolable, autonomous, sovereign and capital of the East." These titles also occur in some of the Julio-Claudian issues (Neumann 2021; Metcalf 2000, 105–111). In adopting the Caesarian time-reckoning system, Antioch received the first building program of a Roman general as a consequence of demographic growth (Rey-Coquais 1978, 45). The construction of the *Kaisarion* (a basilica), theater, amphitheater, aqueducts, and repairs of an altar dedicated to the ancestral gods were the main feats of the Caesarian plan; although none of these survive, either dismantled by successive projects like the fourth-century Forum of Valens, or simply decayed with time, they arguably added a new Roman veneer to the fabric of the former Seleucid capital. Under Augustus, however, the political configuration of the Antiochene remained unchanged and the privileged status of the metropolis was once again recognized (Noreña 2024). Antioch thus retained its administrative apparatus that consisted of *boule* and *demos*. The heavy militarization of the region at this time may have benefited local markets, while commercial transactions with the local community boosted the local economy (Erdkamp 2002, 47–69). No wonder monetization found fertile ground, and, as a result, the mint of Antioch started producing coins of various denominations at an industrial rate (Jones 1998, 263; Noreña 2016, 296–297; McAlee 2007; Neumann 2021, 146–205). The vitality of Antioch's civic mint during the early empire indeed reinforces this argument, while the swift adoption of imperial iconography informs the subtle negotiation between local heritage and the wider frame of reference. As befitted the Princeps, building programs in Antioch broadcasted the new golden age. Antioch's materiality in both town and country, too, underwent major transformations. The monumentalization of the Antioch–Alexandretta route undertaken under Augustus attests to the involvement of the imperial administration in building a new road infrastructure and channeling movement. Paving a key axis of traffic that through the Syrian Gates led to the Mediterranean, however, was only part of the equation. A triumphal arch in all likelihood spanned the road in the vicinity of the modern village of Beylan (*IGLS* III, 744), while the subsequent addition of *ianus*, a monument of similar configuration, plausibly in those same environs, reminded viewers and passers-by of the life and deeds of the general Germanicus, whose life was cut short on 19 October AD 19 in Daphne (Tac., *Annals* 184–191; Suet., *Calig*. 2; *Tabula Siarensis* I, 35–37; Gonzales 1984). A cenotaph in the forum of Antioch also commemorated the site of Germanicus's funeral pyre. Aside from the visual conventions of Julio-Claudian propaganda subtly played out at nodal points of traffic, the urban fabric of Antioch underwent visible modifications. Mediated by the vision of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the man behind a number of conspicuous building projects in Rome and Athens, the upgrade of the city on the Orontes entailed, first, the establishment of an urban development that in true Seleucid fashion identified its main agency (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 9.14). The rationale, shape, and whereabouts of *Agrippitai*, the eponymous urban enclave added at that time, cannot be established. It plausibly included the *Agrippeion*, a bath that was located "near the mountain," of which no physical evidence remains. Second, during the first decade of the first century AD Herod the Great sponsored the paving of Antioch's colonnaded street, an overt act of loyalty and friendship. That the project was seemingly completed under Tiberius is the hypothesis,

despite the emperor's lukewarm interest in sponsoring buildings (Jos., *BI* 1.21.11; *Ant. Jud.* 16.148). No visible attestation of the colonnaded street remains, nor did the 1930s archaeologists succeed in documenting the long avenue, except for a small stretch in sector 16-P of the "Street Digs" excavations (Lassus 1977, 41–81) (fig. 41.5).

FIGURE 41.5. Antioch Excavations, Sector 16-P. Early Roman pavement with elements of the late Hellenistic sidewalk (courtesy of the Antioch Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University).

As a third fundamental project, Agrippa supported the clearing of the debris that, at that point, had obscured the great stadium on the island, allegedly established by Q. Marcius Rex. Earthquakes and neglect had seemingly made the venue unserviceable. That the city gradually acquired a more "modern" presentation, as expected of a provincial capital, can hardly be disputed. Through its sequence of shops and space for retail, the colonnaded street brought about a new idea of a city to be traversed and experienced, one which offered an alternative to the centrality of the agora and its services. A new perimeter of defenses was presumably mapped out during the early decades of the Julio-Claudian era. Tiberius was—again—apparently behind these fortifications that enlarged the original Seleucid perimeter (Lib., *Or.* 1.14) (fig. 41.6).

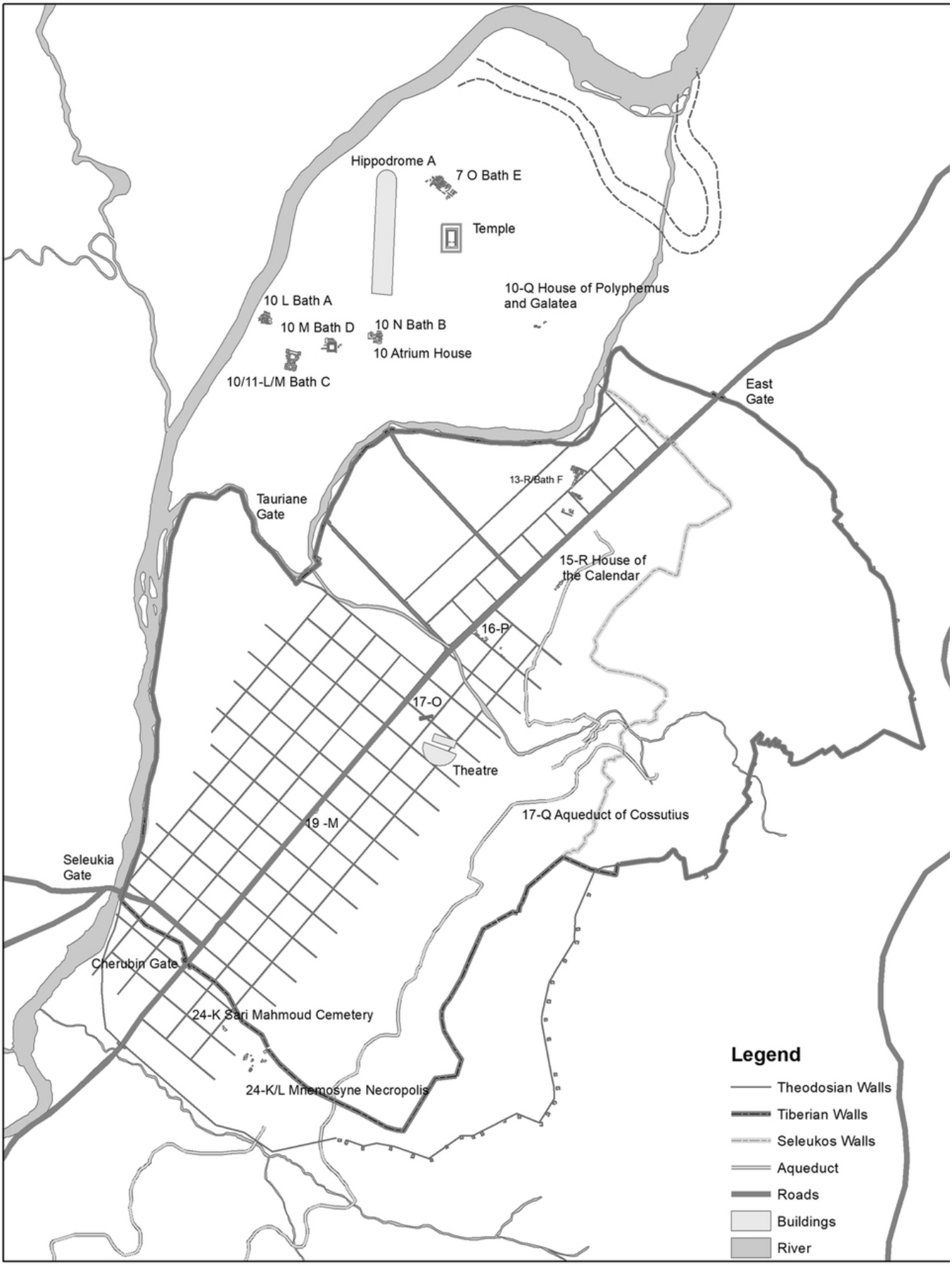
Hippodrome A
7 O Bath E
Temple
10-Q House of Polyphemus and Galatea
10 L Bath A
10 M Bath D
10 N Bath B
10 Atrium House
10/11-L/M Bath C
East Gate
13-R Bath F
Tauriane Gate
15-R House of the Calendar
16-P
17-O
Theatre
17-Q Aqueduct of Cossutius
19 -M
Seleukia Gate
Cherubin Gate
24-K Sari Mahmoud Cemetery
24-K/L Mnemosyne Necropolis
Legend
Theodosian Walls
Tiberian Walls
Seleukos Walls
Aqueduct
Roads
Buildings
River

FIGURE 41.6. The city of Antioch (courtesy of Andrea U. De Giorgi).

An impressive enceinte that encompasses the heights of Mount Silpius and Mount Staurin and falls down to the plain, following the course of the Orontes, thus girded the city and adjacent highlands. The autopsy of this external wall, however, has brought to light at least six different styles of masonry, and its chronology is fraught with difficulties (Brasse 2010; Brasse 2 024; Brands and Weferling 2024). Evident modifications in antiquity and patches of medieval repairs confound the viewer and compress several centuries of building activities. What is more, the expansion of a modern quarry is now threatening the survival of entire stretches. All the same, one can safely infer that the ambitious aggrandizing of the city walls went in tandem with Antioch's demographic growth (Callu 1997). Further, if the chronicle of John Malalas is to be believed, Tiberius added a panoply of temples to Jupiter in the city (presumably a restoration of the earlier Seleucid shrine) and Dionysos, as well as new foci like colonnades and baths (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 10.8–10). In addition, the carving of additional monumental talismans on Antioch's mountains apparently sought to contain the Parmenios's floods. Last, he renamed the river from *Drakon* to *Orontes* and set up a statue of the she-wolf on one of the eastern gates. How this symbol coalesced or competed with the sculptural landscape that, sponsored by the Seleucid kings, still peppered the streets and landmarks of Antioch is the rub. The Antiochenes, however, contributed to this cluttered urban fabric (Saliou 2006, 69–73). Lavished as they were with all these building programs, they set up a statue in honor of Tiberius. Caligula (ad 37–41) also took up the legacy of commissioning public buildings and baths under the aegis of the imperial family; the scale of the earthquake that befell the city in ad 37 may have encouraged repairs in the city and in Daphne, as well as to the water infrastructure (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 10.18–19). The construction of an aqueduct tapping waters from Daphne at this very time is reported by the sources. The archaeological record of Mount Silpius, however, shows an intricate mesh of tunnels, reservoirs, and channels that cannot be safely assigned to the plan of Caligula or that of the second-century ad emperors (Stillwell 1938, 53–54). As with the city walls, these features attest to a host of different project and overhauls that span the life of the city during the entire course of antiquity (Döring 2024). The mandate of Claudius (ad 41–54) also reckoned with the repercussions of the previous earthquake or the realities of a new one, as the imperial house stipulated tax exemption for professional guilds in return for repairs to the damaged porticoes of the colonnaded street (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 10.23). Civic life in Antioch was further enriched by new Olympic festivals, thus fully inserting the city into the network of pan-Mediterranean Graeco-Roman cities.

The Flavian era indeed represented a key moment in the history of Antioch, for the city increased its role as a military milieu in the East. A milestone of cylindrical shape found at the site of Küçük Dalyan Köyü, commemorating the excavation of a canal of three Roman miles, with bridges, under the governor Traianus, in the year ad 75, is a gripping testimony of the scale of waterworks promoted by the imperial house with a view toward facilitating the navigability of the river and thus easing the transport of troops from the new military harbor at Seleucia to Antioch (Van Berchem 1983, 186–196; *IGLS* 1131). It should also be noted that in ad 73–74 a similar undertaking had been commissioned and excavated by the population of Antioch for industrial purposes; two twin inscriptions record the completion of the project under the governorship of Ulpius Traianus (Feissel 1985, 77–103. Also, Downey 1961, 232; n. 151). What is more, new monuments were added by the last member of the Flavian dynasty, that is, Domitian: a temple dedicated to Asklepios and a monumental bath "of Medea near the slopes of the mountains" (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 10.50). The presence of the Roman bureaucratic and religious apparatus must have also increased at this time. The inscription of L. Maecius Postumus, possibly on the architrave of a building near the hippodrome, informs us about the

presence in Antioch of a former *promagister* of the Arval Brothers collegium (Antioch Archives, Princeton University; *AE* 1968; Scheid 1990).

Antioch became virtually the second imperial capital under the principate of Trajan (ad 98–117). The vivid description of the city at the time of the earthquake that hit in ad 115 gives us a glimpse of the city's size and degree of urbanization. Thus Dio Cassius wrote (68.24.1–2): "For as Trajan was wintering there, and many soldiers had gathered there as well as many civilians, whether for judicial hearings or on embassies or as traders or out of curiosity, there was not a province or a community which remained unharmed, and thus in Antioch the whole world under the Romans suffered disaster."

Trajan himself miraculously escaped the fury of the event and offered a generous thanksgiving to Zeus Soter in Daphne. What is more, the archaeology corroborates the chronicles of the event, as several houses excavated in the 1930s by the Princeton team displayed signs of major rebuilding activity or downright abandonment around the early second century ad. The evidence of the House of the Calendar and the House of Trajan's Aqueduct is a good case in point. (Levi 1947) (fig. 41.7).

FIGURE 41.7. The House of the Calendar (courtesy of the Antioch Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University).

The Trajanic mandate also had positive effects inasmuch as the emperor commissioned the construction of various monuments, some of which were designed to repair the city after the ad 115 cataclysm. In that vein, the main street was apparently enlarged, reaching an average

width of 9 m, and potentially of 13 m, as suggested by its remains in sectors 16 P and 19 M of the 1930s excavation (Lassus 1977, 146). With red and grey granite columns of at least 6 m in height, the project was presumably led to completion under Antoninus Pius (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.24). A new gate, the *Mese Pule*, spanning the Parmenios and near the temple of Ares was commissioned by the emperor some time around ad 116; on it was a relief of the she-wolf (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.9). The frenzy of repairs and new building programs also included the construction of new baths and an aqueduct, as well as the completion of the theater (Leblanc and Poccardi 2004, 239–256; Levi 1947, 340). On the proscenium was apparently the nymphaeum with the sculptural Kalliope group, with Seleucus and Antiochus bestowing a crown on the nymph (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.9; Lib., *Or.* 1.102–103).

Daphne, too, received post-earthquake assistance, and the construction of the temple of Artemis must be seen in that context (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.11).

The Antonine era corroborated the generally healthy state of the economy of the region and led to the undertaking of substantial building programs in the city. Campaigns against the Parthians once again projected Antioch to the center of the Roman world. A fire raged out of control in the time of Antoninus Pius (138–161) (SHA, *Pius* 43.2), forcing evacuation and destroying homes and public buildings. The damage caused by the blaze led to yet another program of urban repairs; allegedly, the emperor completed the paving of the colonnaded street thus bringing to conclusion the project started by Trajan (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.24). A bath called the *Centenarium* and a temple dedicated to the Muses are also assigned to the emperor (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 11.30). More substantial building programs, however, may have occurred under Commodus (180–192), with the construction of a bath known as the *Commodium*. He also restored the adjacent temple of Athena, added the *Xystos* and a temple to Zeus to the center of the city (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 12.2). Indeed, this cluster of buildings was key to the revival of civic life that the restored Olympic games brought about.

The Severan dynasty rose to the highest at a key juncture in Roman history. The ad 193 failed coup of the Syrian legate, Pescennius Niger, showed the limitations and internal contradictions of the Roman state (Hdn. 1.186–197 [2.7–8]; Downey 1961 236–239). Control over the Syrian legions went hand in hand with securing the highest seat in Rome. In practical terms, Pescennius' brief intermezzo and Antioch's unconditional support to the cause led to extreme measures once Septimius Severus (193–211) restored normality. More to the point, the new emperor separated Syria into two units—Coele and Phoenice—in an effort to facilitate control of the region. Meanwhile, Antioch was downgraded to the status of village (*kome*) under Laodicea, Antioch's Seleucid twin sister. Crucially, Olympic games and any spectacles were banned, too (*TIB* 15.547). In so doing, Septimius Severus replicated the punishment imposed on the city by Marcus Aurelius in the aftermath of Avidius Cassius's failed coup of ad 175. The banning of the games and the prohibition of public gatherings (SHA, *Aur.* 25.9–10; *Avid. Cass.* 9.1) had set a precedent for Septimius Severus' enactments. The reinstating of the provincial capital's prerogatives under Caracalla (ad 212–217) closed a long, unfortunate hiatus (*TIB* 15.547–548). The end of the Severan dynasty and ensuing power struggles, however, intersected with the rise of a new powerful dynasty in the districts of Fars, Persia: the Sasanians (Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 9–19). What cannot be disputed is that Antioch suffered greatly at the hands of the Sasanian king Shapur in ad 253 and, possibly, in 260, in the aftermath of the military catastrophes at Carrhae and Edessa. Whether through the treason of the *curialis* Mariades, or by effectively exploiting the weaknesses of the city's topography, it is plain that the Persians captured it and may have enslaved a sizable portion of the population. The episode of the Persian soldiers appearing on Mount Silpius as many Antiochenes were enjoying a play in the theater is a well-known trope (Amm. 23.5.3; Pseudo Hegesyppus, *De excidio* 3.5.2). All the same, that the Antiochene captives wound up becoming the main actors

behind the establishment of gridded cities reminiscent of Roman urban planning, like "Šapur's better than Antioch," that is Gondešapur in Khuzistan, or implicated in the establishment of bridges and dams in Susiana is a concrete possibility (*Res gestae divi Saporis* 310–311; Potter 2005, 225). Although the Persian occupation of Antioch was not permanent, the Sasanian threat to Mesopotamia and Syria still remained. Only the Palmyrene intervention curbed their expansion and prevented the collapse of the eastern *limes*. Of course, Queen Zenobia had a far-flung agenda; coins minted in Alexandria with the legend Septimia Zenobia Augusta powerfully advertised her aspirations. Antioch, too, was not exempt from the turmoil of the period and may have been ruled by the Palmyrene house in 270. The defeat of the Palmyrene forces commanded by Zabdas at Immae in ad 272, however, restored Roman authority under Aurelian (270–275) over Antioch and Syria.

Diocletian (ad 284–305) sanctioned a watershed in the history of the Roman Empire and demarcated a new era in Antioch as well, as new monetary reforms were enacted and the city took up its role of military headquarters of the East (Neumann 2021, 266–270). After at least two visits, the emperor established his headquarters here with a view toward launching a military campaign against the Sasanian king Narseh (ad 293–302). Diocletian made his mark as builder, for in ad 297 he established a new imperial enclave on the island, on the site that had hitherto served as residence of the Seleucid kings. The project was hardly a novelty, for an imperial palace had been begun by Gallienus (ad 253–268), who then went on to select Mediolanum as his headquarters (Elsner 1993). As Ćurčić noted, Diocletian's residence in Antioch fused the idea of a grandiose *domus* with the amenities that identified the prerogatives of power, most notably the hippodrome and a temple. As such, the palace has to be seen in the context of the great imperial projects of the Tetrarchy: Thessalonika, Mediolanum, Split, and later, Constantinople (Ćurčić 1993). How the Antioch complex negotiated the palatine blueprint is difficult to infer, nor did the 1930s excavations succeed in teasing out its layout: the relationship between temple, hippodrome, and the tract of land west of the latter still needs to be explored. Diocletian also sponsored a most ambitious building program that spanned Antioch and Daphne; in particular, the catalogue of new edifices includes a bath near the palace and four more thermal facilities scattered across the city, including the so-called *Senatorium*, all of unknown location. Granaries, an imperial residence, and a stadium in Daphne were added as well. The latter was also embellished by the temple of Zeus Olympios and a temple to the Nemesis. Moreover, he restored the temple of Apollo, seat of the ancestral cult. Massive purges of Christians were enacted at this time. Overall, these were the heroic days of the early church, and Antioch had no shortage of martyrs: the bishop Cyril is but one example (Downey 1961, 329). But the Christianity that survived those tragic events was far from united and brought to bear acute divisions and recourse to force in the following decades. Violence in the city on the Orontes, however, was not only directed against Christians. In ad 313, Licinius's troops murdered two thousand Antiochenes inside the hippodrome. They were guilty of dissent and protest against the emperor, who had neglected to offer a dole to the city and its community (Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 12.49).

The tilting of the Roman world operated by Constantine had consequences for Antioch. Despite the channeling of resources and energies toward the Bosphorus, Antioch received the assistance and largesse of the imperial house in many ways. First, the *Palaia*, the old church, was rebuilt by Vitalis in ad 314 and signaled the beginning of a new era for local Christians. Of course, this major project was later paired up with the establishment of the new, octagonal church, presumably built on the island, near the palace between ad 327 and 341. Its exact location, design, and chronology are a matter of dispute (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 7.32.4; Deichmann 1972; Goilav 2014). The sources suggest that the church was near the statue of Antiochos IV slaying the bull placed on the *Tauriane Pule* and that the construction entailed the destruction

of the bath of Philip, which at that point was no longer serviceable (Theod., *Hist. eccl*. 5.35.4; Ioh. Mal., *Chron*. 13.3). The donation of the cross of Christ by Constantine's mother, Helena, may have enhanced the sense of sacred that radiated so vigorously from the building. More fundamentally, Christianity was emerging in all of its vigor from decades of unspeakable violence and heroism; the staggering scale of the building, its innovative architecture, and lavish décor gestured at the triumph of Christ and, overall, at the opening of a new epoch of confidence and unremitting faith (Kleinbauer 2006).

As hostilities with the Sasanians resumed once more, Constantius II (ad 337–361) used Antioch as imperial headquarters (Theod., *Hist. eccl*. 1.11–12). Occasional repairs of public buildings by emperors or imperial administrators signified the long arm of the state, with initiatives of local *curiales* conversely dwindling. Food crises and the enforcement of Arianism heightened tension in a city where factions, claques, and religious affiliations created an inflammatory environment; the junior emperor Gallus (ad 351–354), in particular, compounded the situation establishing a "reign of terror." The situation did not ameliorate under the short-lived tenure of Julian (ad 361–363); in a climate of pagan revival, reinstating of civic duties, and restoration of temples, the utopia of Antioch becoming the epicenter of a pagan church was cut short by the sudden death of the emperor as he led an offensive against the Sasanians in Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, food crises and the chasm between Arianism and orthodoxy augmented tension in the city; Valens's attempt to elevate Antioch to the status of imperial capital partially palliated the sorry state of affairs (fig. 41.8).

FIGURE 41.8. Solidus of Valens minted in Antioch, 364–367 (courtesy of the Harvard Art Museums).

In particular, he sponsored a very ambitious project that centered on the creation of a new forum and, altogether, of a "new" capital city. Charged with political and didactic *gravitas*, the forum blended a host of old buildings (temple of Ares, *Mese Pule*, *Xystos*, *Commodion*, *Horologion*, and *Plethron*) with new lavishly decorated *basilicae* and statues, not least that of his brother Valentinian (ad 364–375) (Mal. 13.340; Downey 1961, 403–410; Brands 2016, 19–30). Overall, this reconfiguration of the city was aimed at repositioning Antioch at the center of the Roman world. Under Theodosius I (ad 379–395), however, the city suffered greatly from the usual ills: food crises, earthquakes, and social unrest. The ad 387 revolt against taxation with

consequent destruction of the images of the emperors went down in history as the manifesto of late antique civic instability and vehement imperial response. New fortifications and the development of a southern borough were successively brought to completion by Theodosius II (ad 408–450), thus moving the fulcrum of the city away from the northern swaths and the island (now presumably abandoned) and inaugurating a new phase for Antioch. But things did not turn out as planned. The earthquake of ad 458, under the reign of Leo (ad 457–474), wreaked havoc in the city (Guidoboni 1994, 296–300) and was the harbinger of the string of catastrophes ahead. Evagrius and Malalas document, presumably referencing the same source, the almost wholesale destruction of the buildings, especially houses on the island, and less extensive damage in the southern sectors (Downey 1961, 477 n. 6). The two hippodromes (A and B), as well as the temple are the only surviving features of urban development on the island (Pamir 2015). Nearby the 1930s archaeologists identified domestic units and a host of baths that illustrate the nature of settlement in the district and its abrupt termination.

Under the mandate of Justin (ad 518–527), Antioch's darkest season began, one that was punctuated by natural catastrophes of an unprecedented scale. Between ad 525 and 542, fires and earthquakes devastated the city; tenacity, resilience, faith, and a little help from the imperial authorities kept this community alive. From this point on, however, Antioch's political profile changed in fundamental ways, for the "pearl of the east" gradually evolved into a smaller, crippled urban community. The earthquakes of ad 526, 528, and 588 (the last of which was said to have killed sixty thousand people), the fires of ad 525 and 527, and, last, the ad 540 Persian conquest by Khusraw I Anūsharwān accounted for Antioch's shrinking and—indeed—loss of political prominence. Changing the name of the city into Theoupolis, that is "City of God," was of no avail (*TIB* 15.557). Justinian's reconstruction plan, however, figures prominently in Procopius's *Buildings* (Procop., *Aed*. 2.10.1). Procopius reports that Justinian rebuilt stretches of the highland fortifications that had been damaged by the attack. His builders realized a defensive system that was more rational, better suited to the asperities of the terrain (especially the steep stretch between Mount Staurin and Mount Silpius) and, overall, more tenable (Brasse 2010, 279–280; Brasse 2024). Cisterns were also built into towers of the acropolis, baths, reservoirs, bridges. Further, Justinian commissioned the repair of the water infrastructure, and not least, the impounding system in Parmenius gorge, completing the so-called Iron Gate (fig. 41.9).

FIGURE 41.9. The Iron Gate (photo taken by Andrea U. De Giorgi).

He also undertook a diversion of the River Orontes along Antioch's land walls, in line with previous similar projects carried out under Augustus and especially the Flavians. The thoroughfare was also revamped with repaving and new porticoes, albeit on a smaller scale. Churches, too, received their fair share of attention, with restoration of the Theotokos and that of the Archangel Michael in Daphne. The city that emerged from the ashes was significantly smaller, at least 20 percent of the former expanse (*TIB* 15.559), with the new northern wall reducing much of the built environment, and the island presumably reduced to a wasteland. Justinian, moreover, went as far as ordering the dismantling of the stadium to supplement stone for the new walls along the left bank of the Orontes (fig. 41.10).

FIGURE 41.10. Stadium, Stair 4, remains of concrete core (courtesy of the Antioch Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University).

Amid outbreaks of plague (ad 550, 560, 591/592), earthquakes (ad 551, 570, 577), sectarian violence, and a Sasanian siege (ad 611) Antioch's urban community survived. After a poorly documented experience under the Sasanians, Antioch was taken back by Heraclius in ad 628. It was a small victory at a complicated time, one in which the emperor also had to come to terms with a Christianity that was more divided than ever. A threat that no one had seen coming, however, materialized at this very time in the Levant. The Battle of Yarmuk of ad 636 declared the final loss of the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. Antioch was lost; its passage in

ad 641 to the Arabs went almost unnoticed and ushered in a new phase in the life of the city (De Giorgi and Eger 2021).

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CHAPTER 42

APAMEA ON THE ORONTES

JANINE BALTY AND JEAN-CHARLES BALTY

The Foundation of the City

Known by the name of Pharnake during the Persian period, the city was probably restricted to the tell which seems to have been occupied since the Neolithic. Its name of Pella, recorded by some ancient sources, refers quite certainly to a first Macedonian settlement of Antigonos, ca. 316/315 BC; but the town was far more extensively refounded, together with Antioch, Laodicea, and Seleucia Pieria with which it formed the Tetrapolis of northern Syria, in 300/299 BC by Seleucus I Nicator with the dynastic name of Apamea, that of the sovereign's wife Apama. At the bottom of the acropolis, which occupied the top of the tell and corresponds to the medieval and present village of Qal'at al-Mudiq, the city wall enclosed an area of about 280 ha on the plateau to the east (fig. 42.1), that was crossed by a large central avenue (*embolos*) running rigorously north–south and two slightly narrower perpendicular ones, thereby creating a typical "Lorraine cross" plan; this organized the different districts of the town in a hierarchical system, with the agora and the temple of Zeus equaling the position and the surface of the citadel in the middle (Balty 1991).

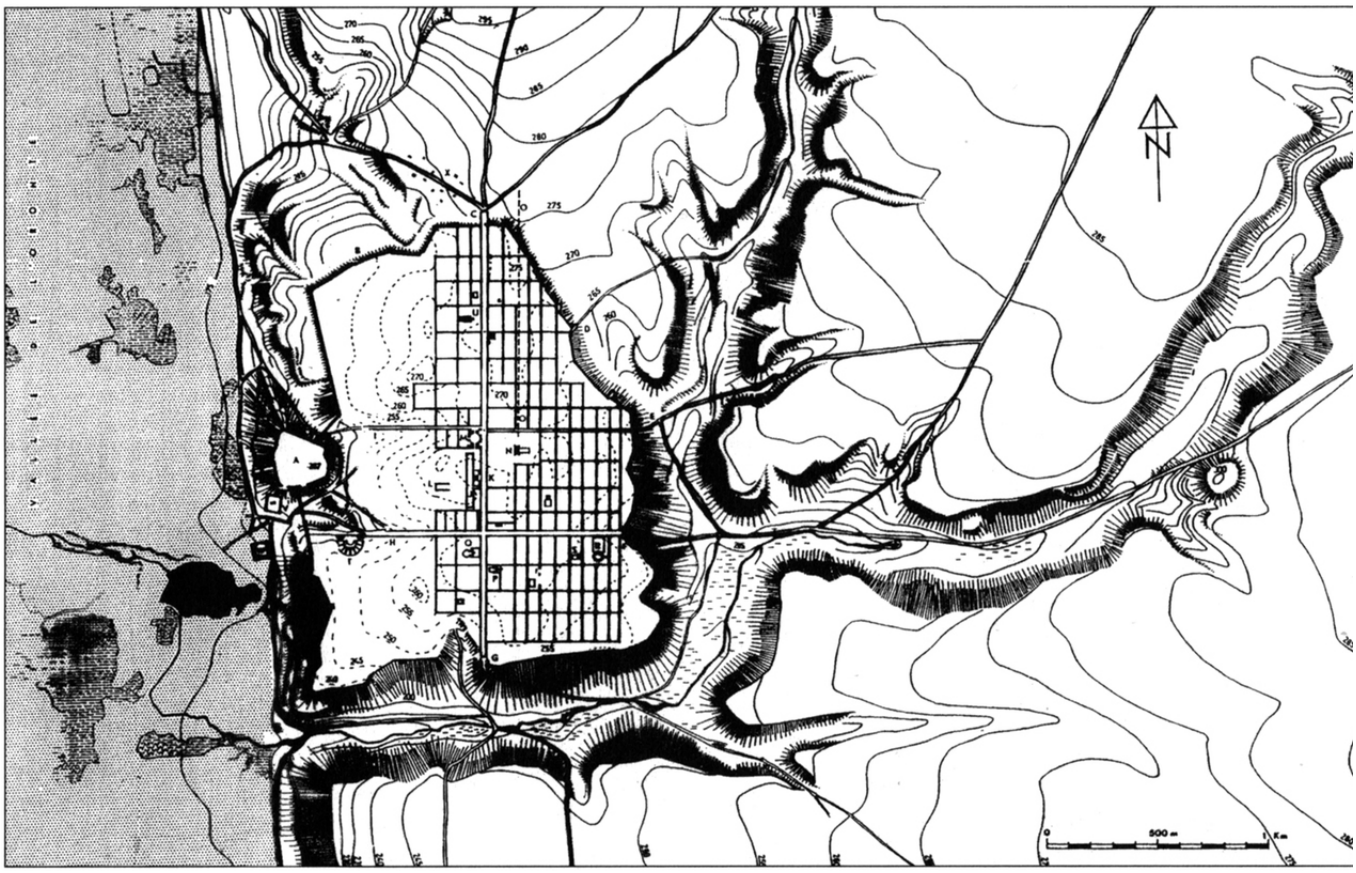

FIGURE 42.1. Apamea. General plan of the city (drawing: Paul Mignot).

The Hellenistic Period and the Early Roman Empire

Since the beginning, the city was the headquarters of the Seleucid army, with five hundred war elephants, a pay corps office, and a stud farm that comprised no fewer than thirty thousand mares and three hundred stallions. "Riding masters, masters-at-arms and anyone who was paid to teach the art of warfare were also stationed there" (Str., *Geog*. 16.2.10). The reverse of a bronze emission of Seleucus minted at Apamea bears the figure of an elephant, characteristic also of several emissions of the sovereign all over his kingdom; and the same image still occurs on different local emissions of the city in the first century BC, which is obviously reminiscent of the ancient forces of the Seleucid armies, even though Antiochus III had been obliged to hand them over to Eumenes of Pergamon by the peace treaty of 189/188 BC with Rome. However, Apamea retained real military importance throughout its history. During the whole Hellenistic period and the wars between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, it was always from Apamea that the Seleucid armies started their campaigns (el-Zein 1972). Its citadel, reinforced by Antiochus IX between 113 and 108 BC, was razed to the ground by Pompeius in 64. But during the civil wars at the end of the Roman Republic (46–42 BC), Q. Caecilius Bassus resisted at Apamea three years with two legions, before surrendering to Cassius; after the battle at Philippi, Cassius's legions returned to Syria with Marcus Antonius and, under the command of Saxa, had to defend Apamea when Labienus invaded Syria with the Parthians (41/40 BC) and laid siege to the city. Cassius Dio (48.25.1–4), who records this last event, explicitly uses the word τὸ στρατόπεδον to speak of the camp, which could have been situated in the northwestern part of the town, where aerial photographs show what seems to be a large special walled area (Balty 2

007, 117–119, fig. 1). One century later, the Tyche of Apamea is represented seated, with a shield on her left side and holding a spear on the reverse of a tetradrachm from a local bronze emission minted under Claudius (*RPC* I, 4376–4378), a clear allusion indeed to the city's military role. This exceptional emission—Apamea had minted only on rare occasions during Augustus's and Tiberius's reigns, and did not mint anymore after that—celebrates the restoration works conducted in the city after the earthquakes of AD 37 and of the first years of the emperor's reign, together with the beginning of a new local era and the adoption of the epithet *Claudia* that would remain linked to the name of Apamea until the third century. Claudius was also responsible for the construction of the two aqueducts that provided water to the city from sources situated in the steppe near Salamiye and at the bottom of the Ansarieh mountains near Massyaf (Balty 2000a, 473–481; *AE* 2000, 1495; Balty 2016, 236–244), and for a large monumental fountain—one of the earliest ones in the eastern provinces—at the northern end of the great colonnaded avenue that runs north–south through the whole town. It was an important period in the history of Apamea; it is illustrated too by the construction in the courtyard of the northern gate, of a large exedra-like monument dedicated to C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus, who remained governor of the province for an exceptional ten years between AD 51 and 60, and was to die there.

The Earthquake of AD 115 and the City of the Second Century

By the beginning of the first century, more precisely in the time of Quirinius, the governor of Syria, i.e., AD 6, as stated by the well-known but often discussed Venice inscription (*CIL* III, 6687), the population of the *civitas* of Apamea amounted to "millium homin(um) civium CXVII," that is probably some half million persons altogether for the town itself and its territory. But the city suffered a terrible earthquake on 13 December AD 115 (the date is given for Antioch by Ioh. Mal. 275.3–8) and had to be completely rebuilt at a level some 0.50 m higher than before, making it necessary to clean the ruins and to cancel most of the buildings of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Today, with its magnificent Great Colonnade reconstructed by the Directorate General of Syrian Antiquities and Museums since the 1960s (fig. 42.2), Apamea is mainly a city of the second century AD.

FIGURE 42.2. Apamea. The "Great Colonnade" (photo: Jean-Charles Balty).

But the Hellenistic town planning survived after the earthquake and its original grid was to last until the end of the city in the early Middle Ages with the typical measurements and proportions of other contemporary colonial foundations (Antioch, Laodicea). In the northern section of the Colonnade, large baths open on to the avenue which were donated to his native town by L. Iulius Agrippa, a rich benefactor whose family descended from local tetrarchs and who often conducted embassies to the emperors in Rome; Agrippa also decorated the building with bronze copies of well-known Hellenistic statuary groups (Theseus and the Minotaur; Apollo, Marsyas, Olympos, and the Scythian slave); but he had participated too in the rebuilding of several miles of the aqueduct (Rey-Coquais 1973, 39–46, nos. 1–2; Balty 1981, 47, 56, 205–207, nos. 19–20, fig. 50, 228–230). In the center of the town, the temple of Zeus Belos, the huge mass of which—even now completely destroyed down to the concrete of its high podium—dominated the agora; it was renowned for its oracle, who Septimius Severus visited in the 180s, when he was legate of the Legio IV Scythica in Syria, and who promised him the empire (Cass. Dio 79.8.5–6; Balty 1981). On the agora itself, two inscribed consoles of the rear wall of the porticoes with dedications of the Council and the People to C. Iulius Severus, who had been appointed legate of the Legio IV Scythica in Syria and had replaced the governor C. Poblicius Marcellus at the head of the province during the Bar-Kokhba uprising in Judaea in AD 132–135, date the construction to the reign of Hadrian; those on the remarkable spiral fluted columns of the Great Colonnade, in front of the east entrance to the agora, once bore bronze statues of the emperors Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus (*IGLS* 1312–1313; *AE* 1971, 468), around AD 166. To the south, a large nymphaeum with a baroque architectural decoration of niches and statues opening onto the Colonnade at its crossing with an important east–west avenue (Schmidt-Colinet and Hess 2015) belongs to the same architectural program, which seems to have been ongoing throughout the century. At the western end of this east–west avenue, a large theater (diam. ca. 139 m), cut into a depression to the south of the acropolis with the same plan as the theater at Aspendos, which is dated to

the reign of Marcus Aurelius, completed the monumental outfitting of the town. Innumerable shops opened on to the porticoes of the Great Colonnade and those of the two perpendicular colonnaded avenues. Large houses (some of them reaching the unusual dimensions of 2,000 to 4,500 m^2) have been excavated in the northern, central, and southeastern quarters: despite continuing transformations in the course of the centuries, their planning and main structures also go back to the extensive rebuilding of the city after the earthquake of AD 115 (Balty 1984, 471–472, 490, fig. 1).

Intellectual life in Apamea is attested thanks to the names of the physician Archigenes, a native of the city, who came to Rome at the time of Trajan (*Suda* A 4107; he is also mentioned in the *Satires* of Juvenal, 6.239, 13.98, 14.252), and, later on, of the anonymous poet of the *Cynegetica* (once attributed to Oppian), also a native of Apamea. Also in the second half of the century, the teaching activity of the philosopher Numenius started in the city; his writings were to deeply influence the Apamean Neoplatonic school after the settlement there, around ad 269, of Amelius Gentilianus who had spent twenty-four years at Plotinus's school in Rome. In another connection, theatrical performances have left us the names of Iulius Paris, an actor of tragic pantomime (Rey-Coquais 1973, 47–48, no. 10), and of P. Aelius Crispus, actor of tragic and rhythmic mime (*IGLS* 1349).

Apamea and the Parthian Wars of the Third Century

The time of the Severian dynasty was another important period in the history of the city. After the death of Commodus, when the governor of Syria Pescennius Niger was proclaimed emperor in Antioch by his soldiers (AD 193), the ancient sources do not state explicitly if Apamea declared immediately for him, or for Severus who had been proclaimed emperor by his troops in upper Pannonia at about the same moment. Laodicea, through rivalry with Antioch, had declared for Severus, and it is quite certain that Apamea, also through jealousy, had chosen the same party; it was there also that Severus had come, some years before, to consult the oracle, and the response of the god had announced to him that he would reign. The city was certainly rewarded for its behavior in the civil war. Family links of the Severan Augustae with Apamea might also explain the interest of the successive emperors in the city: the father of the future Emperor Elagabalus, Sex. Varius Marcellus, the husband of Iulia Domna's niece, Iulia Soemias, was himself an Apamean (Cass. Dio 79.30.2) and had begun in Rome, under Septimius Severus and Caracalla, an important career that brought him, after the vice-prefectorate of the praetorium and of the town at Rome, to the office of governor of the province of Numidia (*CIL* X, 6569); later, after the death of Caracalla and the accession of Elagabalus, Iulia Maesa, Iulia Domna's sister and Elagabalus's grandmother, was to have a statue erected on a console in the agora of Apamea (*AE* 1974, 649). It is no surprise then if, some twenty years later, when Caracalla came back from Alexandria where he had to hurry to stop sedition (AD 215), the municipal authorities of Apamea which honored him in an inscription (Mouterde 1952; *IGLS* 1346) are known as ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος Κλ(αυδιέων) Ἀπα[μ]έων Ἀντωνεινουπόλεως, the city having adopted the name of the emperor, even for a short period as it is no longer attested later on.

Preparing his campaign against the Parthians with some of the troops his father Severus had raised since 196/197 for his own campaign of ad 197–202 against the same enemy, in ad 215 Caracalla settled the Legio II Parthica in the headquarters of Apamea. This special unit that had been stationed near Rome at Albano after its return from the East—the other two Legiones Parthicae, I and III, having been left by Severus at Singara and Rhesaina (Mesopotamia) to

protect the newly created province—was to accompany the emperors on expedition to the East twice more during the next decades as a reinforcement of the Cohortes praetoriae, Cohortes urbanae, and Equites singulares Augusti, and came back each time to Apamea for its winter quarters there, in ad 231–233 with Severus Alexander, and in ad 242–244 with Gordian III. In this respect, the cleaning, study, and dismantling of tower XV of the Apamean city wall during the Belgian excavation campaigns of 1986–1988 have led to the discovery of more than 120 gravestones (altars, cippi, and stelae) of soldiers who died during these expeditions, and provides a great amount of new evidence and information about these events; it represents one of the most significant discoveries of last century as regards the Roman army in the third century (Balty 1987; Balty and Van Rengen 1993; Balty 2018).

Most of the stones bear figures of soldiers, usually wearing the so-called camp-dress then in fashion: a long sleeved tunic and a coat draped over the left shoulder and forearm, the military belt with ring-shaped buckle, sword, spear, and shield; *lanciarii*, who first appear at such an early date in our documentation (they were usually linked with Diocletian's army reforms), hold five javelins in the right hand and an oval shield in the left; centurions have the *vitis* and a dagger; *beneficiarii* hold a stick with strips, which distinguished them from other *principales* of inferior ranks; *tesserarii* have another kind of stick, or staff, in the right hand and a bundle of tesserae, which looks like a sort of casket, in the left; the *librarius officii legati legionis* has in his left hand a *capsa* containing the documents; the *aquilifer* holds the eagle. Many of these soldiers and officers also have in the left hand a roll (*volumen*), that clearly alludes to their testament; and, indeed, the names of their heirs, who erected the monuments are indicated in the inscriptions on the gravestones (fig. 42.3).

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FIGURE 42.3. Apamea. Funerary cippus of Sept. Dardisanus (photo: Marc Balty).

The legion's honorary titles of *Antoniniana*, *Severiana*, and *Gordiana* allow us to attribute most of the documents to one or the other period of wintering of the Ἀλβάνιοι (as they were called in some of our ancient sources) at Apamea. But there were too, in the same tower, some gravestones of soldiers belonging to the Legio III Gallica, the Legio IV Scythica, and the Legiones XIII and XIV Geminae who also participated in the expeditions. The most extraordinary discovery however, was that of a lot of twenty-three stelae of riders of the Ala I Ulpia Contariorum and of the Ala I Flavia Augusta Britannica, two of which dated from 252 by a consular date. They refer to another and later period, when the Sasanian king Shapur I made raids in Syria, plundering Antioch and Apamea. These auxiliary cavalry units, both normally stationed in Pannonia on the Danube frontier, were specially transferred to Syria in order to stop these raids of eastern horsemen: with their long lance (*contus*) often represented in their hands on the stelae, the *contarii* were particularly suited to resist the assaults of the heavily equipped Sasanian *cataphractarii*. These events of the year 252 were not well documented in our sources, nor clearly dated until now; the discoveries of Apamea throw important new light on them (Balty 1987).

Coming back to the history of the city, it must be added that, after the death of Caracalla, it was in the camp of Apamea that Macrinus, arriving from Antioch to reassure himself of the loyalty of the Legio II Parthica, proclaimed his son, the Caesar Diadumenianus, as Augustus, offered the soldiers some privileges, and gave the inhabitants an expensive dinner (Cass. Dio 79.34.1–5); some weeks later, however, the wheel of fortune had turned, and the city dedicated a statue to Iulia Maesa, the grandmother of Macrinus's opponent Elagabalus. In the second half of the century, we hear only of the usurper Iulius Saturninus besieged and killed by his own or Probus's troops "in castro quodam" (*Vitae quadr. tyr*. 11.3), which Jerome (*Chron*. p. 224c Helm), following Eusebius, said was Apamea; another and clear testimony of the town's real military role.

Apamea and the Neoplatonic School

As has already been emphasized, with Amelius Gentilianus's arrival in Apamea, ca. AD 269, a period of intense teaching of philosophy began that had certainly started already with Numenius, but was now to give real fame to the city. Amelius, Porphyry (*Vita Plot*. 3) wrote, "had copied and collected all the writings of Numenius and had learned the greatest number of them by heart. And at Plotinus' lessons, he had taken notes from which he had composed a work in nearly 100 books that he dedicated to Hostilianus Hesychius, his adoptive son." A clear continuity thus existed with the teaching of Numenius since this time, and the Neoplatonic school was to know still more importance and renown when Iamblichus settled at Apamea in turn; probably at the very end of the 280s. After having visited the most important intellectual centers of his day (Rome, Alexandria), the native of Chalcis had chosen a city where the heritage of Plato had been particularly alive for a century (Balty 1999 [2014a]). Eunapius's description (*Vita phil*. 5.1.4) of the atmosphere at Iamblichus's school is a vivid testimony which ought to be quoted expressly: "he had a multitude of disciples, and those who desired learning flocked to him from all parts. And it is hard to decide who among them was the most distinguished, for Sopater the Syrian was of the number, a man who was most eloquent both in his speeches and in his writings; and Aedesius and Eustathius from Cappadocia; while from Greece came Theodorus and Euphrasius, men of superlative virtue, and a crowd of other men

not inferior in their powers of oratory, so that it seemed marvellous that he should satisfy them all." Apamea had become indeed, as Libanius himself stated at the moment (*ep*. 1389 Förster), the city that was "beloved of Iamblichus and the mother of Sopater." After the death of Iamblichus, around AD 325, Sopater succeeded him at the head of the school; but soon after he was called to the emperor's court in Constantinople, where he exercised great influence, and somewhat later, having been victim of intrigues with indictment for magic, was put to death. Aedesius had to move the school to Pergamon, where, on his death, he was succeeded in turn by Eustathius. They were all this "choir of the Apamean philosophers, whose coryphaeus resembled the gods" (Lib., *or.* 52.21 Förster), and Iamblichus was really "the divine Iamblichus," as the emperor Julian and Proclus called him, "the Syrian inspired by the gods" (ἔνθους ὁ Σὐρος) as written in an oracle known through Syrianus (*schol. in Arist*. 18 f 3).

The discovery, during the Belgian excavations of the years 1937–1938 and 1971–1979 under the cathedral of Apamea, of a series of mosaic pavements with a clear Neoplatonic signification (most recently Balty 2014b), have raised the question of the exact identity of the building which they so profusely and magnificently decorated: they paved long porticoes and very large rooms that cannot be considered to belong even to a very rich house and offered panels successively representing Socrates as one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece (fig. 42.4), the return of Ulysses to Ithaca as a symbol of the soul recovering Philosophy at the end of its life (the ἀναγνωρισμός of the Neoplatonists), the crowning of Cassiopeia as the Beauty itself (ἡ Καλλονή; *Suda* K 453) in the competition with the Nereids, and a strange panel figuring a crown adorned with a large gem, lying on a garment ornated with *orbiculi* and *gammadia*, and inscribed with the words εὖ χρῶ, "use it well | make good use of it," perhaps recording Julian's own ideas about kingship and power as expressed in his *Second Panegyric to Constantius*, and mainly in his *Epistle to Themistius* (Balty 1974, 270–272, figs. 1–9).

FIGURE 42.4. Apamea. Mosaic of Socrates and the Wise Men (photo: Apamea Excavations 1938).

The mosaics have been dated, since the beginning (Hanfmann 1951, 208–209), to the 360s and G. M. A. Hanfmann, following J. Bidez, did not hesitate to consider that they could have

been part of a program of consciously Hellenic opposition to Christianity developed at Apamea in the years of Julian's presence in Syria ad 362–363; an admirer of Iamblichus, the emperor would not have missed the opportunity of coming from Antioch to Apamea to pay a visit to the city of the philosopher; and Hanfmann was certainly right to suggest that Sopater the Young, the son of the former Sopater, who had composed philosophical writings too and had established Olympic games in ad 361 at Apamea, "may well [have] represent[ed] the type of patron for whom mosaics such as the Socrates mosaic were made" (Hanfmann 1951, 221; the other pavements were not yet discovered). It is also our opinion, and the building itself could have been a sort of memorial recording the glory of the Apamean philosophical school. No doubt it had to be hidden and superseded by a Christian church as soon as the new religion had prevailed.

The Destruction of the Temple of Zeus Belos and the First Christian Churches

It could have been very soon; the mosaics were, indeed, in excellent condition and the cultural, philosophical, and religious situation had changed radically immediately with the reign of Theodosius. In a city like Apamea,"friend of Zeus" and "that had continued to worship Zeus when it was forbidden to worship the gods" as Libanius wrote, in AD 363 (*ep*. 1351 Förster) referring to the reign of Constantius and the first edicts of AD 356–357 against the pagan cults. The emperor's decision to renew the prohibition of sacrifices to the gods and to close the temples resulted in tragic events, dated about AD 386–388; they are reported by Sozomen (*Hist. eccl*. 7.15.13) and by Theodoret (*Hist. eccl*. 5.21.5–15). With the help of the troops, probably those of the Praetorian Prefect of Oriens, Bishop Marcellus succeeded in dismantling the temenos and burning and completely destroying the temple of Zeus. It was the time of the first Christian churches in the province—and particularly in the nearby Jebel Zawiye, the southern part of the so-called Massif Calcaire of northern Syria—as stated by the dedicatory inscriptions of Tell 'Arr (375/376), Hass (388/389), and Khirbet Muqa (394/395); in this last church, the mosaic pavement was laid precisely under Bishop Marcellus in a building the restoration of which—it is interesting to point it out—had started already under his predecessor John at the end of the 370s. Like other cities in the East, Apamea had had its own martyrs, the best known of whom is certainly Mauritius: he had been judged and condemned to death, with his son and seventy of his comrades of the imperial army who had chosen the Christian faith, in a tribunal specially held at the northern gate of the city; a large basilica remembers the event, some 400 m from there *extra muros* (Balty 2013).

At about the same time (ad 392), the Jewish community—which had been important in Apamea as well as in the other cities of Syria since the Hellenistic period—had its synagogue paved with mosaics donated by several members of the community (*IGLS* 1319–1337; Balty 1986, 6–9, plates 5–13); it was decorated with geometrical patterns—a perfect and well-dated example of the so-called rainbow style then in vogue in the East, both in religious buildings (in the churches too) and in private and public ones (baths) too. Some decades later, however, due to possibly anti-Jewish outbreaks in the province, the monument was destroyed and completely covered by the construction of a church; the first architectural phase of this building was to develop in the sixth century into a large "atrium church" devoted to the cult of the Syrian martyrs Cosmas and Damian (Napoleone-Lemaire and Balty 1969; Brenk 1991). Since the beginning of the fifth century, the cult of the martyrs had been developing in the East, and the

original chapel containing the reliquaries to the north of the choir was enlarged and decorated with a rich *opus sectile* pavement that covered the former mosaic one.

Apamea, Capital of Syria Secunda, and the Earthquakes of the Sixth Century

In foreign affairs of the empire, the fifth century was a quiet and peaceful period for Syria thanks to the treaty concluded between Rome and the Sasanians. With respect to internal and territorial administration more specifically, around AD 415 the province of Syria, already split by Severus who had detached from it Syria Phoenice, was divided into Syria Prima, with Antioch remaining its capital, and Syria Secunda, with Apamea rising to the same position in its province (Balty 1980). In this city, the so-called "édifice au triclinos" was probably the palace of the governor: the building had been enlarged with its own bath complex and was to be restored, in the sixth century, with a dedicatory inscription recording that the works were done at the time of an imperial official of the highest rank, the μεγαλοπρεπέστατος Apellion (*IGLS* 1344), possibly a governor. The church organization immediately adopted an equivalent division of the ecclesiastical province, Apamea becoming the see of an archbishopric that comprised the subordinate sees of Arethusa (Rastan), Balaneia (Baniyas), Epiphaneia (Hama), Larissa (Shaizar), Mariamme (Mariamin), Raphaneia (Rafniye), and Seleucobelos (Sqalbiye?). At the end of the century, real theological problems, disputes, and even rebellions arose; these resulted from the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in October AD 451 to recognize the double nature of Christ and the following rise of monophysitism in the eastern provinces of the empire; this affected Apamea especially in the first decades of the sixth century. The newly elected patriarch Severus of Antioch, one of the most important figures of the Monophysite church, designated Bishop Peter to the see of Apamea, and this resulted in continuous difficulties with some of his suffragans, who were evicted and excommunicated, and the monks of the convents in the province, who were attacked by Peter's troops; there were massacres, and even a real battle at Larissa. But with the accession of Justin I, an orthodox emperor, Severus was deposed in AD 518 and fled; and Peter fled from Apamea too.

On 29 May ad 526, Antioch suffered one of the most terrible earthquakes it had ever experienced: our sources give the number of 250,000 to 300,000 dead (Ioh. Mal. p. 420.6; Procop., *Bell.* 2.14.6); and after a series of repeated shocks, a second major earthquake affected the city on 29 November ad 528. As on previous occasions, Apamea was severely hit and had to start a true campaign of remodeling in some areas of the town. One of the most spectacular was the complete repaving of the Great Colonnade some 0.50 m above the former surface, with nice rectangular slabs of soft limestone and footpaths on both sides, that clearly indicates that the street was no longer used by carriages and had been transformed into a large pedestrian avenue (Mertens 1969, 61–68, fig. 3; Balty 1989, 80–84). There was also the construction of monumental *tetrakionia* on the avenue (Balty 2000b), some 50 m to the south of the former east entrance of the agora, now closed by a large public latrine; another monument of the same kind seems to have been built at the same moment at the entrance of the cathedral on the southern east–west colonnaded avenue. The magnificent tetraconch church, which had been discovered and partly excavated in the 1930s and nearly completely freed in the 1970s, seems to have been the cathedral of Apamea, at least after the earthquakes, the former one having been destroyed elsewhere in the city. With all its dependencies (cœmeterial chapel, baptistery, baths, peristyle, and rooms obviously part of the archbishop's palace), the building recalls the so-called martyrion of Seleucia Pieria that has also

been considered a cathedral; the imposing *synthronon* with its high central trone in the apse also suits this function very well. Moreover four inscriptions (on the pavement of the entrance along the east–west avenue, dated ad 533; on the medallion of a mosaic in the southeastern quarter of the tetraconch; on one of the capitals at the entrance of the choir; and on another medallion of the *opus sectile* pavement behind the apse) recalled the work of Bishop Paulus, who was at the head of the ecclesiastical province of Syria Secunda at the time of the council held in Constantinople in AD 536. Paulus, who seems to have been old at that time (he did not attend the council personally, appointing one of his suffragans instead) and was no longer alive in ad 540, had probably been chosen for his strict orthodoxy after the accession of Justin I and the departure of Peter: the inscription of the mosaic pavement (fig. 42.5) specifically refers to the archbishop's knowledge of the heavenly doctrine, and the wild animals placed around the medallion—some of them attacking or pursuing each other, others simply placed on both sides of a plant—seem to allude to the religious quarrels of the past years and to the peace recovered since then (Balty 1976).

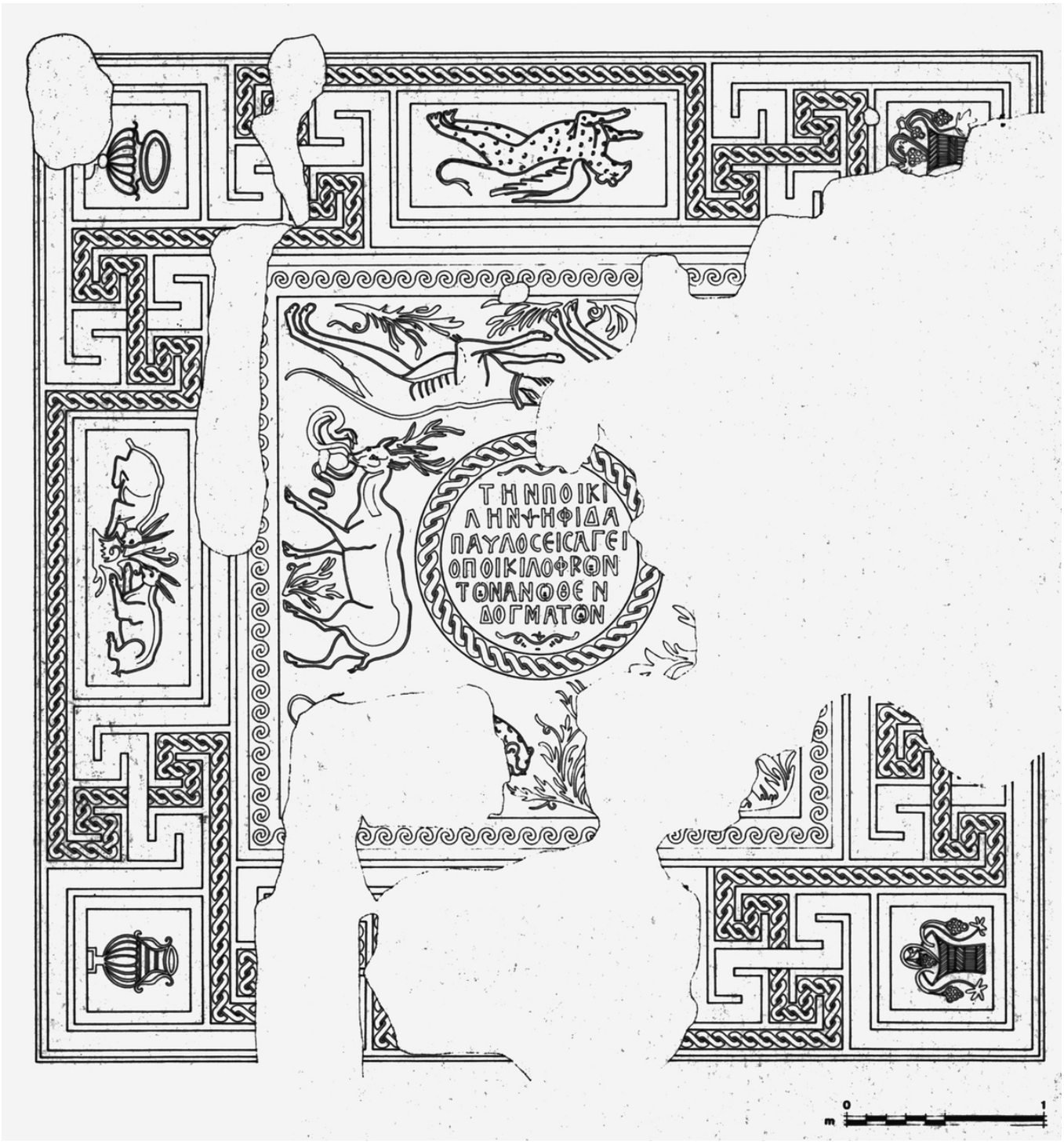

FIGURE 42.5. Apamea. Mosaic of Bishop Paulus (drawing: Théo Halkin).

The Persian Wars of the Sixth Century and the Arab Conquest

The long reign of Justinian, which started in Syria with the rebuilding of the cities destroyed by the earthquakes, was particularly affected by the sudden resumption of the Persian war and the sack of Antioch by Chosroes in AD 540. At Apamea, Bishop Thomas succeeded in avoiding the catastrophe, attributing this to the protection of the fragment of the Holy Cross that was

kept in the cathedral and that he exhibited all around the church as a talisman; the city had, of course, to pay a tribute but was left safe by the Persians. In AD 573, however, it suffered a raid by Adharmahan (Adaarmanes), the cavalry commander of Chosroes, which had much more crucial consequences for its history. The depiction by Evagrius (*Hist. eccl*. 5.10, p. 206) of the situation of the city "that had once been happy and densely populated but had very much declined by the time" does not perhaps correspond exactly to the importance of the restoration works and the construction of new buildings which had been carried out during the reign of Justinian and are clearly attested by the archaeological remains all over the town; it would certainly apply better to the period immediately following Adharmahan's raid. But there may have been some new earthquakes in AD 551 and 557 as occurred in Antioch, and "the city walls had collapsed, due to their age." At any rate, Adharmahan burned the entire city and "went on, taking in captivity the inhabitants of the city and those of the surrounding areas. With them, he had taken too the bishop of the city and its governor." Other sources give the number of the prisoners as 292,000 (John of Ephesus, *Hist. eccl*. 6.6 Brooks; Michael the Syrian, *Chron*. 10.9 Chabot). Chosroes II too attacked Apamea in AD 613, and the Persians seem to have remained in the city, as they did in Antioch, for some years, before the reconquest of the country by Heraclius in AD 628. The emperor was defeated, however, by another conqueror, the Arabs, at the Battle of Yarmuk, in August AD 636; and within the following months, after the fall of Homs (AD 637), the Muslim armies had advanced on the main cities of northwestern Syria. As stated by al-Baladhuri, "abu ʻUbaydah continued then in the direction of Maʻarrah Hims, that later took its name from al-Nuʻman b. Bashir al-Maʻarri. Here too the inhabitants came to meet him beating the tambourines; the same occurred also at his arrival in Famiya [the Arabic name of Apamea]; all were obliged to pay tribute, *gizyah* and *kharag* [the personal and the land tax]" (Caetani 1909, 790 § 273). Apamea had opened its doors to the conquerors: this was certainly, as has been suggested, because of the Monophysite inclination of a great part of the population and in reaction to the fiscal oppression of the orthodox Byzantine state. In front of the invaders, the rich landowners of the surroundings living in the city had fled to the provinces, which were still in the hands of the Byzantines; but the countryside also emptied within some decades and the villages of the Massif Calcaire were soon abandoned. Families from the ʻUdhra and the Bahra tribes—those from this last and Christian tribe already present in the plain of Homs before Islam—settled at Apamea (Gibb 1960, 215). Deep social changes ensued. The large houses of the city were divided into much smaller units; their porticoes were closed and occupied sometimes by ovens and wells, bored even into former reception rooms; no less than sixty-two shops and/or workshops of craftsmen covered the whole northern part of the "édifice au triclinos" and more settled in the great northern courtyard of the cathedral, constituting a real *suq* in this part of the city. In the houses as well as in these shops, ceramics and coins date this last phase to the Umayyad and ʻAbassid periods. The Christian community survived at Apamea for many decades: Bishop Thomarikos is attested in AD 666 (Theophanes, *Chron*. p. 348.24 De Boor); the last known bishop, George, was banished to Martyropolis (Maypherqat, in Mesopotamia) by al-Walid I in the beginning of the eighth century.

The site of Apamea, correctly identified at Qalʻat el-Mudiq (Afamiya) by travelers since the second half of the eighteenth century (C. Niebuhr, 1766), has been excavated by a Belgian archaeological expedition since 1930 after a short campaign of reconnaissance and preparation in 1928. Restoration works on the Great Colonnade by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums started in 1967; since the 1980s, they have been conducted by the local Department of Antiquities of Hama. The Apamea museum at Qalʻat el-Mudiq, settled in the Ottoman caravanserai at the entrance of the village, opened in 1982.

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CHAPTER 43

THE DECAPOLIS

OLYMPIA BOBOU AND RUBINA RAJA

Introduction

Decapolis was the collective name given to several cities in the region between Judaea and Syria (for the region, see mainly Kennedy 2007, who calls the region a "virtual island"; for its history, geography, and people, see the succinct introduction in Lichtenberger 2022). It is mentioned as such in the New Testament (Mk 5:20; Mk 7:31; Mt 4:25: see Cousland 2001, 58–61; Lichtenberger 2003, 6–7; 2022, 219–220). Their number, however, ranges from ten (Plin., *HN* 5.16.74) to eighteen (Ptol., *Geog.* 5.14.18), and Pliny also mentions that different writers include different cities. His list contains Damascus (Syria), Philadelphia (modern Amman, Jordan), Raphana (perhaps located at modern Ar-Rafi'ah, Syria), Scythopolis (modern Beit She'an, Israel), Gadara (modern Umm Qais, Jordan), Hippos (modern Sussita, Israel), Dion (perhaps modern Tell Ashari, Syria—or Aydoun, Syria), Pella (modern Tabaqat Fahl, Jordan), Gerasa (modern Jerash, Jordan), and Canatha (modern Qanawat, Syria). The inscription *IGR* III, 1057 from the time of Hadrian, shows that in the second century AD, Abila (modern Qweilbeh, Jordan) was also part of the Decapolis. It has been suggested that Abila was part of the Decapolis in the time of Pliny, but he had mistakenly put it under the neighboring tetrarchies (Lichtenberger 2003, 63). In addition to these eleven cities, Claudius Ptolemy's list includes Heliopolis (modern Baalbek), Saana, Ina, Samoulis (location unknown), Capitolias (modern Beit Ras, Jordan), and Adra (modern Der'a, Jordan). One more city in his list is Abida, which may be identified with Abila (Lichtenberger 2003, 63; Cohen 2006, 277; Cimadomo 2019, 132). This means that Claudius Ptolemy's list contains seventeen cities, three of which have not been identified, and one whose location is uncertain (Dion). The most important implications of the different numbers, though, are that (1) the cities never became a league, but always maintained their autonomy, and (2) as such, cities could choose whether they wanted to belong to this loose federation—if one can call it that (Lichtenberger 2022, 219–220). The absence of the word "Decapolis" on the legends of the coins of the cities also indicates that the term was not one tied to the administration of the region but only the geography. The freedom of the cities to belong to the Decapolis also means that the geographical boundaries of the region could change, and while some changes may be connected to specific events, such as Pompey's organization of the province, others may not be possible to understand anymore (Lichtenberger 2022, 220; for the coinage, see Spijkerman 1978).

The name Coele Syria was also used by Latin authors to designate the region, a term which—despite appearances—may not derive from the Greek *koile* ("lying in a hollow/vale" in this case) (Bickerman 1947, 256–266; Mason 2016, 226), but from the Aramaic *kol*, meaning "whole" (Shalit 1954, 64–77; Sartre 1988, 15–40; 2001, 154–155). The geographical boundaries of Coele Syria are just as shifting as those of Decapolis: while it may have referred to the area of the Bekaa Valley at first, it later encompassed southern Syria, including Judaea and Palestine. This was precisely the area fought over by Ptolemies and Seleucids and, based

on epigraphic evidence, it seems that the terms Syria and Coele Syria were equivalent and used for expressing domination over a region that encompassed the southern Levant, Transjordan, Hauran, and the area of Damascus (Sartre 2001, 154–155; Lichtenberger 2003, 13–16; Mason 2016, 226; Cimabomo 2019, 95–97). Recently Anca Dan and Étienne Nodet (2017) have claimed that the boundaries of the region were flexible and changeable from period to period, but this has been disputed at length by Maurice Sartre (2018) and more briefly by Michaël Girardin (2020). The idea that Coele Syria designated a completely different region in the Roman period than in the Hellenistic is indeed a very extreme form of cultural amnesia (for cultural amnesia, see Millar 1993, 6; Dan and Nodet 2017); however, it highlights the problem of how to define a region whose political boundaries shifted over time but whose people retained their communal awareness that it was a distinct region, as can be evinced by the continuity of the use of the term "Decapolis" in inscriptions.

In the New Testament, which contains the earliest use of the term, the Decapolis is seen as an area clearly distinct by Judaea: it is populated by people who raise pigs (Mk 5:20; see also Klinghardt 2007; Lichtenberger and Raja 2020a, 166–167). In Josephus (*BI* 2.18.1), its people are described as Syrians; however, the cities also had a significant Jewish population that suffered at the beginning of the Jewish Wars—the only exception was at Gerasa, where the locals escorted the Jews to the borders—and safety (*BI* 2.18.5). That the two peoples probably spoke the same dialect can be inferred from the New Testament references, where the people of the Decapolis were able to understand Jesus. Even though the population was described by contemporary authors as Syrian, with Jewish inhabitants as well, the cities are usually described as "Greek" or "Graeco-Roman" or "Hellenized" or "Hellenic" (see Kraeling 1938, ix; Cousland 2001, 58; Ward 2020, 20; Lichtenberger 2022, 219). This definition partly stems from the material culture (especially coinage, inscriptions, architecture), and partly from literature (Josephus writes of "Greek cities" in his works). The coexistence of non-Judaeans, Judaeans, and Greeks makes the Decapolis an ideal location for studying the processes and results of multiple cultures living in the same area.

Historical Overview

The cities of Damascus (small settlements near it: see Akkermans 2014, esp. 138–149, 142–143; see also Burns 2019; Conard 2016a; 2016b; 2016c), Philadelphia/Amman (settlement of ʿAyn Ghazal: al-Nahar 2018), Scythopolis/Beit She'an (Braun 2004; see also Huigens 2019), Gadara/Umm Qais (see Huigens 2019), Pella/Tabaqat Fahl (Edwards 2013), Gerasa/Jerash (Lichtenberger and Raja 2020a, 153), Abila (Shunnaq 2004, 406), and Heliopolis/Baalbek (Paturel 2019, 98) have yielded archaeological evidence of habitation from the Neolithic period. Some of the settlements seem to have been abandoned around 1500 BC, while the Amarna letters (written between 1379 and 1362 BC) show that some of these settlements played an important role in the region and were already established in the location of their later Hellenistic foundations (for example, Damascus and Scythopolis/Beit She'an: Moran 1992; Junkkaala 2006).

For several of the cities of the Decapolis, however, their past started with Alexander the Great: this is evidenced by names such as Pella or Dion, both cities in Macedon that evoked nostalgia and created a link with the past for the first Greek settlers. Together with Capitolias and Gerasa, they claimed to have been founded by Alexander III himself, although there is no archaeological evidence for this or any historical sources before the sixth century (for the cities and their foundations, see the concise narrative in Sartre 2001, 82–84, 116–117, 120–121; see

also Cohen 2006, who has gathered all the evidence; see also Lichtenberger 2003: while his focus is on the religious material culture and expression and what they can reveal about the culture, he includes historical introductions to each city under consideration). While one cannot dismiss the possibility of persisting local legends that attributed the refoundation of the cities to Alexander III, since these particular settlements were already in place by his time or that of his successors (Sartre 2001, 83; but see also Sartre 2001, 382–384, who argues that, since every foundation must come from a ruler's decision, one should not dismiss these claims), it is more likely that the citizens wanted the connection for reasons of prestige and elevating the status of their city. After all, Alexander III was more than a conqueror: he had claimed divinity already during his lifetime, and after death, he was regularly depicted as a god, and his achievements created an enduring legend throughout the lands that had belonged to his empire (the literature on Alexander III is huge and impossible to cover here: see Ogden 2023, with earlier bibliography; see also Patterson 2010, 83–108; Versnel 2011, 439–492; for the legend of Alexander III: Stoneman, Erickson, and Netton 2012; Manteghi 2019; Djurslev 2024).

The later Hellenistic period was one of changes for the Decapolis. The first was the expansion of the Hasmonean kingdom, especially under Alexander Jannaeus (r. 103–76 bc). He conquered several of the cities of the Decapolis, including Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Scythopolis, and Gadara. One of the demands Alexander Jannaeus made of his new subjects was that they change their religious rites to those of the Jews; the inhabitants of Pella refused to convert and their city was razed to the ground (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 13.397). While Josephus does not write that the other cities suffered the same fate, it seems that their inhabitants did not fare well and that destruction was widespread. Those who could, seem to have escaped: Sartre (2001, 396–397) associates the move of several intellectuals to Italy with the conquests of Alexander, such as Philodemus of Gadara, who was associated with the powerful family of the Pisones, and whose library and works were probably found in the villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum (see Gigante 1 995; Zarmakoupi 2010; Lapatin 2019). Others were sold into slavery, and some of them ended up belonging to members of the highest aristocracy of Rome, like Demetrius of Gadara, who became a slave, and then freedman of Pompey—and for whose sake, Pompey rebuilt Gadara (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 15.75). Pompey's arrival in Syria is the second important moment of this period for the cities. More than rebuilding Gadara, he organized the province (see Andrade and Raja, c hapter 13, this volume). For the cities of Decapolis, he was not a conqueror but the one who restored to them their freedom and independence from Hasmonean rule. To honor him, they adopted the "Pompeian" calendar, starting from either 64 or 62 bc (Stein 1990; Sartre 2001, 450–451). The last moment is the integration of Gadara and Hippos into the kingdom of Herod thanks to the liberality of Augustus soon after the Battle of Actium (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 15.217). With the death of Herod, both cities became part of the province of Syria (Sartre 2001, 471).

The Roman period is, for the most part, a period of stability and great economic prosperity, especially from the second century onward. This is reflected largely in the architecture of the cities. The cities were affected by the Jewish Revolt, with the citizens complaining to Vespasian, who had been sent by Nero to quell the insurgence, that they were being attacked by the Jews (Jos., *Vit*. 65; Sartre 2001, 579–581: see also Bowersock 1973 for the aftermath). More devastating than wars and changes in political and religious rulers seem to have been the earthquakes that affected the region in 363 and 748 (Russel 1985; Wechsler et al. 2018; Lichte nberger and Raja 2019; Blanke and Walmsley 2022).

The Archaeology of the Region

The Hellenistic-period archaeology and the material culture of the region are known only to some extent and through sporadic finds. At Pella itself, there are few remains of the Hellenistic period, but excavations in the surrounding area have revealed remains of domestic architecture as well as two fortresses (McNicoll, Smith, and Hennesy 1982, 65–76; McNicoll 1992). The situation is similar in Gerasa, developed west of the River Chrysorrhoas, the "Golden River," where the Hellenistic phases are mostly known from building remains in the sanctuary of Zeus and the location of the modern museum, as well as from stray finds (Lichtenberger and Raja 2020a, 155; 2020c; 2020d, 22–28; for the river, see Lichtenberger and Raja 2018b; Brughmans et al. 2021; Lichtenberger et al. 2021). At Hippos, a sanctuary founded in the late second–early first century BC is the most important vestige of the Hellenistic period, however, its temple was rebuilt in the late first century BC (Segal 2013a; 2013b, 67–68). A second-century BC sanctuary and enclosure are the main remnants of the Hellenistic phase of Gadara (Weber 2002; for Heliopolis/Baalbek, see chapter 45, this volume, and for Damascus, see Burns, chapter 37, this volume).

The excavations at Scythopolis/Beit She'an have revealed that the settlement was on two hills, at Tell Beth Shean and Tell Iztaba: both have revealed building remains as well as other signs of occupation. The settlement at Tell Iztaba was abandoned after a catastrophic event, most likely the destruction caused by Alexander Jannaeus. An inscription to Zeus Olympios is the only secure evidence for his cult in the Hellenistic period—however, the temple that was associated with it in earlier scholarship has now been reevaluated and dated to the Roman period (Ward 2020, 99–101). The Hellenistic-period remains from near Philadelphia (at 'Iraq al-Amir) show the wealth and power of the local rulers, but there is little from the city itself (for Hellenistic Philadelphia, see Lichtenberger 2003, 244–245; for 'Iraq al-Amir, see Will and Larché 1991; Larché 2005; Rosenberg 2006). From the sites of Tell Ashari, perhaps identifiable with Dion, Philadelphia/Amman, as well as from Abila and Capitolias there is no archaeological evidence of their Hellenistic phases (for these, see Lichtenberger 2003 and Cohen 2006).

Excavations in the last city, however, have revealed a Roman-period tomb with extraordinary wall paintings covering the walls of the larger of its two chambers: the figures include gods and humans engaging in a variety of activities. The humans are shown clearing a site under the guidance of deities; a man in a toga is offering a sacrifice to Zeus Capitolios, the Tyche of the city, and the Tyche of Caesareia Maritima (identified by inscriptions and iconography); then the construction of ramparts and a city wall is shown, followed by an assembly of gods. The gods are also depicted as taking part in a banquet. What makes the scenes even more unusual is the inclusion of numerous inscriptions in Aramaic—written with Greek letters—wherein the various characters express emotions and speak out their activities. The paintings have been interpreted as scenes showing the foundation of the city after the approval of the gods, and it has been suggested that the tomb belongs to the founder of Capitolias. The toga of the sacrificing man shows that he was a Roman citizen, a rare honor, if the tomb is from the first century AD (for the tomb see: Haron, Al Adarbeh, and Lash 2019; Weiss 2020; Aliquot and others 2022, for the sacrifice, see esp. 115–118) (fig. 43.1).

FIGURE 43.1. Sacrifice scene. Image © CNRS Hisoma 2019.

The only comparable scene from the region is on an illicitly excavated mosaic from Apameia, where there is also a sacrifice scene with the founder and patron gods (see Olszewski 2018; 2022).

If these paintings show the founding of Capitolias, as is likely (Aliquot and others 2022), then they show a city where most of the people conducting the various works speak Aramaic—but

not the painters of the tomb, who had to transcribe the words phonetically. At this point, it is not possible to know whether this was a deliberate choice that would connect the local elites to the Roman ones and separate them from their neighbors, or if using Greek to write Aramaic was widely practiced in the city and is a phenomenon comparable to Coptic, which is Demotic Egyptian written in Greek, or the much later Karamanlı, in which the Greek alphabet was used to write Turkish (fig. 43.2; Aliquot and others 2022, 204).

FIGURE 43.2. Workers with donkey, one saying to the other in Aramaic "We have killed the donkey." Image © CNRS Hisoma 2019.

They also show at least one elite member—the man sacrificing—wearing his toga and thus separating himself from the others thanks to the privilege of being a Roman citizen. The figure of Zeus can be compared to that of Jupiter Capitolinus (see Hill 1960), while the figures of Tyche dressed in short chiton and a sword belt are typical for the Roman coins of the region. The type appears first in the time of Hadrian (Gersht 1984; Lichtenberger 2003, 297–298), and this seems to fit with the date proposed by Aliquot and others (2022, 107), who suggest a foundation between the end of the first century and the middle of the second century AD.

The excavations in Capitolias are hindered by the continuous inhabitation of the city from the time of its foundation (Lenzen 2003, 74): this means that most of the finds come from small areas where systematic excavations could be conducted (Lenzen 1990; Młynarczyk 2017). As a result, we only have a partial picture of the earliest phases: the city was surrounded by a wall constructed in the Roman period; it remained in use until the ʿAbbasid period, as the various repairs and changes show. Its plan was orthogonal and traces of it remain to this day. An efficient water management system was put in place in the Roman period and was used until

the 1500s. A large Roman building was also restructured as a church in the Byzantine period and was in use until the ʻAbbasid period. A marketplace next to this church dates from the Byzantine period—with remodeling in the Umayyad phase of the site (Lenzen 2003). The city also had a theater, built in the Roman period (al-Shami 2005), more churches, installations for making wine, and other industrial activities (Młynarczyk 2017).

Cities that were abandoned or reduced in size after catastrophic events are much better preserved and give a better explanation of the significance of the region. Gerasa/Jerash is one such case: after the earthquake of 749, the settlement was largely abandoned, and with the shift of power from the Umayyads to the ʻAbbasids and the move of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad, the site lost its importance. When it was resettled in the twelfth century, it was on a smaller scale (Lichtenberger and Raja 2018a; 2020a, 160–161; 2020d, 8–12; Blanke and Walmsley 2022, 90–99). The excavations have brought to light most of the public and religious buildings and monuments of the city, as well as residential areas, workshops, industrial installations, and infrastructure works (Raja 2012, 137–189 remains a valuable synthetic work; the Danish-German Jerash Northwest Quarter Project has from 2011 onward produced a high number of valuable publications about the city: see Lichtenberger and Raja 2021a; see also Andrade 2013, 160–169 for a historical approach) (Fig. 43.3).

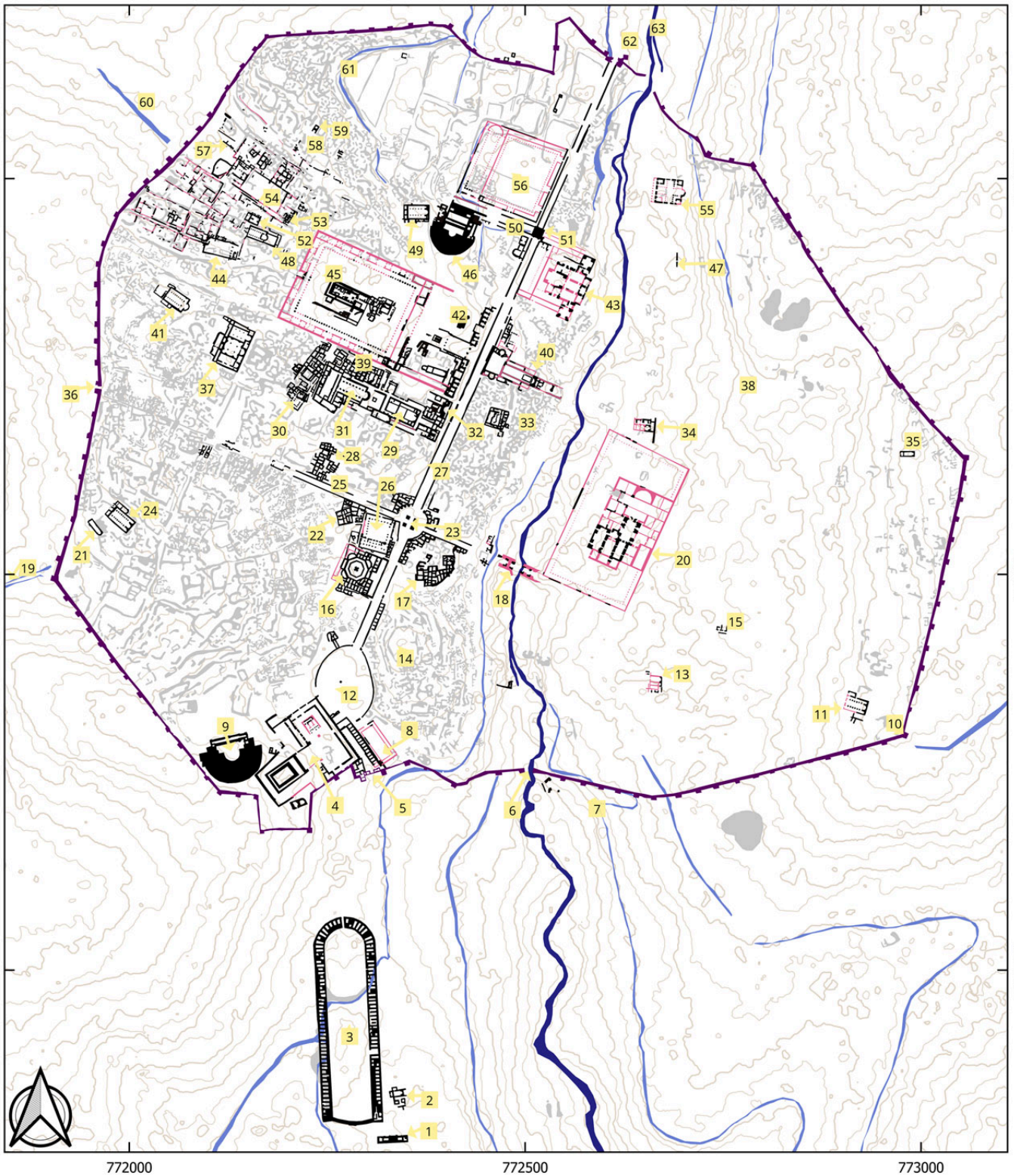
772000
772500
773000
0
100
200
300
400 m
Building Foundation
Conjectural Building
City Wall (after Kraeling 1938)
Water Infrastructure
Remotely Sensed Features
Wadi
10m contours
5m contours

FIGURE 43.3. Map of Gerasa. Map © The Danish-German Northwest Quarter Project.

The city's monumentalization and development can be dated from the first century ad. Most of the public buildings and the two main sanctuaries, of Zeus and of Artemis, were constructed to the west side of the main road that crossed the city on a north–south axis. In ad 27/28, the existing sanctuary of Zeus acquired a large courtyard with an altar, and in the middle of the second century, a new temple for Zeus was built over the small Hellenistic temple and was consecrated in 162/163 (see Seigne 1997; 2002; Lichtenberger 2008, 136; Raja 2012, 151, 156–158). A monumental oval piazza links the sanctuary to the main street (Raja 2012, 158; Yegül and Favro 2019, 715). The South Theatre was also built in the late first century and completed in the second century ad (Segal 2018, 75–77), as well as a market close to the sanctuary of Zeus (Raja 2012, 158) (Fig. 43.4).

FIGURE 43.4. South view of Gerasa. Image ©Rubina Raja.

The sanctuary of Artemis dominates the center of the city; her cult is attested from the late first century and her temple was completed in the second century (Lichtenberger 2003, 200; Raja 2009; 2012, 162), while the so-called North Theatre housed both political assemblies and cultural activities. Adding to the impression of grandeur were the various arches that were erected along the main street, the gates, the Nympheum and the bath complex. While the public buildings continued to be used after Christianity became the dominant religion, the temples of Artemis and Zeus were stripped of marble and used as quarries for the construction of other buildings, most notably churches. A temple of Dionysus was converted into the cathedral of the city (Raja 2012, 162–172; McElroy 2021; for the building activities in Gerasa in

the Roman period, see also Yegül and Favro 2019, 763–770; Lichtenberger and Raja 2020a, 154–160; Ward 2020, 101–107; for the cults, see Lichtenberger 2003, 195–243; el-Khouri 2010). The Danish-German excavations in the Northwest Quarter of the city have revealed a mainly residential area that included the only synagogue known so far from the city, a fourth-century building that was converted to a church in 531 (for the excavations and their results, see Lichtenberger and Raja 2021a; for the synagogue-church, see Lichtenberger and Raja 2020a, 159–160).

The excavations have also revealed numerous large- and scall-scale finds that have given valuable insights into Gerasene society. The large-scale sculptures especially show that marble was imported to the region in different forms: from fully finished statues to blocks that were either roughly carved or in block-form and were carved locally (see Bobou and Raja, chapter 7. this volume [Roman Art]). The pottery, however, shows that imports were limited compared to the large number of local vessels for all occasions (Romanowska, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2021; for small finds from Gerasa, see also Lichtenberger and Raja 2020b; 2021b; 2021c; 2022; Peterson 2023).

The only other cities of the Decapolis whose ruins can be compared to Gerasa are Heliopolis/Baalbek (see Paturel, chapter 45, this volume), Scythopolis/Beit She'an, Hippos/Sussita, and Gadara/Umm Qais, to a smaller degree. For all of them, the first and second centuries ad were periods of intense building activity and monumentalization, with theaters, odeia (attested in Pella, Scythopolis/Beit She'an and Hippos/Sussita, in the third closely associated with the Caesareum, dedicated to the imperial cult) (fig. 43.5), hippodromes (in Gadara/Umm Qais and Scythopolis/Beit She'an), as well as nymphaea, arches, colonnaded streets, and large sanctuaries that create an impression of homogeneity and similarity (for common features in architecture of the cities of the Near East, including of the Decapolis: Yegül and Favro 2019, 711–727; Eisenberg and Segal 2022, 352–353; for Scythopolis/Beit She'an, see Tsafrir and Foerster 1997; Ward 2020; for Hippos/Sussita, see Segal et al. 2013; Eisenberg 2018; for Gadara/Umm Qais, see Weber 2002).

FIGURE 43.5. Pella, Odeion. Image ©MW-MaA/Manar al-Athar

Identities and Importance

This seeming architectural uniformity, together with the widespread use of Greek for coins and inscriptions, and the civic autonomy that the cities enjoyed and proudly displayed on their coin legends, had given the cities their characterization as "Greek." In the first centuries BC and AD, when these cities were freed first from Hasmonean and then from Herodian rule, the area of the Decapolis formed a natural buffer zone between the provinces of the Roman Empire and their client kingdoms, such as Nabatea or the Judaic tetrarchies. Promoting their "Greekness" was a way of differentiating themselves from their neighbors.

The Capitolias tomb paintings, however, open the question of the "Greekness" of Capitolias—and of the other Decapolis cities—in the Roman period. Large parts of the population spoke Syriac as their first language, while the "founder" prioritized his Roman citizenship. If the tomb was commissioned by a member of the family of the "founder" or the "founder" himself, and if the tomb reflects the lived reality in Roman-period Capitolias, then Greek seems to be used more as a *lingua franca* that is used so that the painters can convey the sounds and voices of the people around them in a way that will conform to the expectation of the Greek-speaking and -writing viewers after seeing the gods' names in Greek. Without any inscriptions recording his name or those of his family members, it is not possible to say whether he was a Greek-speaking, Greek-identifying person or a Syrian or Jew who used Greek because that had become the public language of the eastern part of the empire. One cannot dismiss the

possibility that the "founder" was Greek, perhaps a descendant of those first settlers of the city (about whom we have very little information: Millar 2006). What one can say, however, is that being Roman was just as important as being "Greek" to this person.

This *Romanitas* is central to the visual culture and architecture of the cities of the Decapolis, more than Greekness. The statuary in marble from the Decapolis would have functioned just as well in Roman Ephesus or Italy (for the sculptures, see Koçak and Kreikenbom 2023). The colonnaded streets were a late first-century BC Syrian phenomenon that was exported to the rest of the Roman Empire (see Yegül and Favro 2019, in passim). The autonomy of the cities and the religious tolerance of their populations—within limits – is another Roman phenomenon (Beard, North, and Price 1998, 212).

A new, synthetic work that will cover the entire region of the Decapolis from a diachronic perspective is a desideratum of research in the area. The region is covered by Millar (1993) and Sartre (2001) as part of the much broader region of Syria and the Near East, while Dan and Nodet (2017), who do deal with the area, offer a disputed and problematic approach. Kraeling (1938) and Browning (1982) are the only ones aiming to give a historical overview, both with the city of Gerasa as a starting point and main focus of their accounts, while Kennedy (2007) focuses on the landscape, and Lichtenberger (2003) on religion. All these major contributions, however, focus on a brief point of the long history of the region: its Hellenistic and mainly Roman phases. In a region with such a long history and—perhaps—an even longer memory, a work with a *longue durée* perspective still needs to be written.

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CHAPTER 44

HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PHOENICIA

CORINNE BONNET

Conceiving Territories and Spaces A New Historical Framework

For the Hellenistic and Roman periods, as for the preceding ones, the meaning of the term "Phoenicia" is not self-evident. From the Greek *Phoinike*, which gives us the ethnonym *Phoinikes* (Ercolani 2015), this word does not cover any indigenous category nor does it have precise or stable boundaries (Salles 1995; Quinn 2017). In this sense, we might say that "Phoenicia" was invented by the Greeks resulting from their experience of the Aegean and, more generally, Mediterranean space (Horden-Purcell 2000). Alexander's conquest and the creation of the Hellenistic kingdoms did not result in greater political unity in this region, although a cultural *koine* was gradually being constructed throughout the Near East, drawing heavily on local customs. Thanks to the richer, more diverse documentation after Alexander, we can analyze *entanglement* between local realities and the larger global context (Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Roman). From a territorial point of view, it is interesting to examine the reactions of the Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre kingdoms—four relatively autonomous territories that were subjected to the same hegemonic powers over the long first millennium BC. These kingdoms, whose borders are extremely difficult to determine precisely (Sader 2000; 2015) for all the periods considered, had a coastal urban center acting as capital and a hinterland with towns and villages situated between coast, hills, and mountains (Markoe 2000; Guillon 2013; 2015; 2020).

These territories came under Greek-Macedonian domination after the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 bc. Yet they did not form a unified political or cultural entity. Therefore, trying to grasp the division of these territories, their change over time, and their relationship to the heritage of Persian rule is challenging for the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Sader 2015, notes the lack of archaeological data in Lebanon, where excavations and archaeological surveys are rare). Indeed, Alexander arrived in a plural Phoenicia, subject to Persian domination and integrated into the satrapy system. In his *Periplus*, Pseudo-Scylax (104) mentions fourteen cities of varying importance and size as belonging to Phoenicia in around 350 bc, which were located between Arwad and Mount Carmel along the coast in the Eber-Nari satrapy (Hdt. 3.91). As tributary subjects of the Achaemenid Empire, the Phoenician kingdoms nevertheless had real autonomy in domestic politics, institutions, and resource management (Briant 1996). Alexander's conquest continued this state of affairs in many ways.

It is in the Arwad area that we can best assess the territorial impact of the Greek conquest, thanks to Rey-Coquais (1974), Duyrat (2005), and Guillon (2015; 2020). While in Persian times, the Arwad kingdom probably included Paltos and reached Nahr el-Kebir in the south, thus controlling the Homs Gap, the archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the entire area facing the island was a peraia. In the Hellenistic period, this territory extended north to Gabala, east to Raphanea and Mariame, and south to Nahr el-Abrash. Toward the interior, Arwad extended its influence only gradually, as the hills housing the sanctuary of Zeus Baitokaike only came under Arwad control at the end of the Hellenistic period.

Within this vast territory, several cities, such as Marathos, Simyra, and Carne, as well as Gabala, Paltos, and Balanea, would mint coins in the second century BC —a sign of increasing autonomy vis-à-vis the Seleucids and of a territorial breakup in progress. Although the territory of Byblos does not seem to have changed significantly during the Hellenistic period, Sidon extended its territory toward the mountainous hinterland, reaching the Bekaa Valley and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains (Sartre 2001, 148; Guillon 2013; 2015; and 2020). As for the rebel Tyre, it held on to Ma'rubbu and Sarepta but lost Akko, which was refounded and renamed Ptolemais by Ptolemy II Philadelphus at the end of the fourth century BC (Cohen 2006, 213). To the east, however, Tyre's hold is attested as far as upper Galilee and the Lake Houleh region (Sartre 2001, 148). As for Beirut, it escaped Sidon's tutelage and was refounded as Laodicea of Phoenicia (Cohen 2006, 205–209). Beirut was also becoming a very dynamic trade center, as shown by recent excavations and evidence from the island of Delos.

Throughout this region called Coele-Syria, which at first seems to exclude Phoenicia, the satrapic network and the tributary system remained, although it changed hands. Although local royals remained in place for a while, this was perhaps to reward them for the welcome they had given Alexander (excepting Tyre). Yet after 323, the management of the immense empire, inherited by the epigones and diadochs, became more complicated when the Phoenician kingdoms entered the ranks. They were incorporated into a new satrapy, and their local dynasties disappeared within two or three generations (at Byblos from the beginning of the third century, at Tyre in 275, at Sidon in 278, at Arwad before 259; see Sartre 2001, 149–150). These local royals were probably replaced by a civic organization similar to the *polis*, with elected bodies and collective assemblies (Sartre 2001, 39–46, 68–77; Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet 2015). However, identifying these institutional transformations is not simple. The initial situation of the Achaemenid period is not well known, so the scope of the changes remains rather blurry. This is even more true because our only access to the period is through classical authors, who employed terms (*demos*, *archontes*, *boule*, etc.) they were familiar with but whose exact meaning for Phoenicia is unknown. Inscriptions in Phoenician provide some additional information, but they are fairly rare.

In addition to the disappearance of kings, we can glimpse the emergence of representative assemblies, well attested in Roman times but whose composition remains uncertain (elders, civil society?). Moreover, these assemblies were already working with the king in the Persian era. The inscriptions also show local elites with civic functions or titles, such as *shophet* or *rab* ("great"), perhaps inspired by the Carthaginian model. It was thus only very gradually that the Phoenician kingdoms began to resemble Graeco-Roman cities (for more details, see Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet 2015).

There is no evidence showing a united Phoenicia, nor, it seems, the aspiration for such unification. With the separation between the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid Empires at the very end of the fourth century, the Phoenician kingdoms were joined to Egypt, with the exception of Arwad, which passed into the Seleucids' hands and served as a buffer zone between the two areas of influence (Duyrat 2005; Guillon 2015; 2020). Around 200 BC, the Seleucids dominated the entire region. Under Rome, up to Septimius Severus, the whole of Syria encompassed a single province, then was divided into two, adding a smaller Syria-Phoinikè with Tyre as its capital (Sartre 2001).

During Greek and Roman domination over Phoenicia, regional specificities were linked with the broader political, cultural, and economic dynamics that were characteristic of the entire Hellenistic and Roman Near East. These specificities enabled the Phoenicians to find their place in a space that had been redefined after Alexander's conquests. It is true that Greeks and Phoenicians had known each other and interacted since at least the beginning of the Iron Age.

Thus, mutual acclimatization was rather easy; transfer and mediation did not have to wait for the Hellenistic era.

Now we turn to a consideration of the conquest as the founding moment of a great narrative legitimizing the Greeks' actions. Thereafter follows an analysis of the impact of Rome as well as an examination of the transformations in cultural landscapes, in particular religion, between tradition and innovation. The place of local cultures or *micro-identities*, intended as specific local and regional ways of thinking, acting, or producing knowledge, sometimes complementary with imperial objectives, sometimes in tension with them, will be explored and their increased popularity and audience within the broad discourse of the "Graeco-Roman" empire (Veyne 2005; Blömer, Lichtenberger, and Raja 2015). This will enable us to revisit the concepts of "Hellenization" and "Romanization," and their validity, in order to understand the dynamics in Hellenistic and Roman Phoenicia.

Alexander's Conquest: Between Rupture and Continuity

The story of Alexander's conquest of Phoenicia is historiographically of great interest (Bonnet 2014, 41–106; 2015). It is also, unfortunately, one-sided; Phoenician voices are absent because local writing has disappeared. Thus, we have to listen for the echo of Phoenician realities through Greek voices: accounts by Arrian (2.14–16), Diodorus (17.40–47), Plutarch (*Alexander* 24–25), Quintus Curtius Rufus (4.1.5–26), and Justin (11.10). For the most part, they transmit the victors' story, constructed after Alexander's death, with his idealization as a "civilizing hero." These texts fashion a fabric of memory, within which various messages are interwoven to legitimize Alexander's attempt to impose Greek hegemony from the Mediterranean to the Indus. While the sources depict Alexander welcomed as a liberator in Arwad, Byblos, and Sidon, in reality, this was a real seizing of political and territorial control, accomplished with a certain degree of violence. The long siege of Tyre is one of the most explicit manifestations.

To impose this view of a beneficial conquest, bringing civilization and well-being to Phoenicia and the rest of the Near East, Greek and Latin authors resorted to various narrative strategies. First, they highlighted Alexander's motivation as the desire for revenge against the Persians after the Graeco-Persian Wars (Squillace 2010; Bonnet 2014, 46–51). The conquest of Darius III's empire was, therefore, a "just war," in which the gods were on Alexander's side. The power of this claim, as well as political opportunism, may explain why the Phoenicians willingly agreed to submit to a new monarch (with the exception of the Tyrians), especially as he left local sovereigns in place. At the gates of Egypt, where he would be proclaimed a god and the son of a god in the sources of classical authors, Alexander embodies Providence with a universal vocation, a model of Justice over all. In order to better legitimize the use of violence in Tyre, the story of the siege is woven through with subtle echoes of the siege of Troy (Bonnet 2014, 66–80): Alexander is a new Achilles and, as in Troy, it was the Greek *paideia*, linked with *metis*, that won the day over enemies who had been condemned by Fate. The Tyrian resistance fighters were "barbarized," betrayed by their perverted behavior such as the practice of human sacrifice or the persecution of prisoners of war (Bonnet and Grand-Clément 2011). Even the subject of *syngeneia* between Tyre and Carthage reads as proof of a solidarity that was dangerous for the new Greek order.

The set of narrative devices that transformed the fierce and heroic resistance of the Tyrians into a cruel and sick kind of relentlessness, a sign of regression against the progress brought by Alexander, portrays events as a mix of elements of rupture and signs of continuity. In some places, in fact, Alexander seems to insert himself smoothly into the local fabric, leaving local

kings in place and respecting ancestral customs and gods, while in Tyre, the aspect of rupture is brought to its paroxysm. The sarcophagus of Abdalonymus of Sidon, a magnificent marble object today in the Istanbul Museum, usually referred to as "Alexander's sarcophagus," well illustrates the complicity possible between Greeks and Phoenicians. There are scenes of hunting and combat in which Alexander is flanked by a figure who is certainly Abdalonymus, his faithful vassal and intermediary with the locals in Sidon (Stewart 1993, 294–306; Martin 2017). At least some of the Phoenician elites thus took advantage of the change in leadership and fostered the transition; they must have benefited in various political and financial ways. As for Alexander's historians, they were more concerned with marking a break from the Achaemenid empire and the beginning of a new era, characterized by the emergence of a political and cultural *new deal*.

The conquest narratives also reveal the role of religion in this process. The case of the Melqart cult in Tyre provides an eloquent illustration (Bonnet 1988; 2014). Alexander thought he would also be welcomed as a liberator by the Tyrians and stated his demand (and not merely his wish) to make a sacrifice to the local Heracles, Melqart (see Hdt. 2.44, on this "identification" of Heracles with Melqart). As an Argead, he claimed to be descended from that hero. The Tyrians' refusal and Alexander's anger triggered the seven-month siege that would end in a bloodbath. In the end, after the island of Tyre had been conquered by the building of a causeway (mole), Alexander entered the sanctuary and organized sacrifices, processions, and parades in honor of his Heracles and the "Heracles" of Tyre, Melqart, voluntarily superimposed. We see here skillfully woven together the threads of tradition and those of innovation. A highly skilled user of the resources of polytheism, Alexander employed a "double language" that allowed the ancestral god of Tyre to be honored by the tribute that the new master of the empire paid to *his* own Heracles, the hero-god of the Greek fable and protector of the Macedonian dynasty.

Borrowing a rich concept of Richard White (White 1991), it appears that all this reveals the existence in Phoenicia of a *middle ground*, a space of transactions, negotiations, and compromises among the various forces at work. Even though there was a relationship of force between the dominant and the dominated, there were also forms of cultural-religious dialogue and social strategies affecting the identities, affiliations, and sense of belonging of local populations. It is precisely the complexity of these processes, between norms and creativity, that encourages us to revisit the overly rigid and unilateral notion of "Hellenization" (Bonnet 2014; 2019).

The transition from Seleucid to Roman tutelage between the second and first centuries bc was a completely different process, which was not the subject of a great epic narrative. Historians have long stressed the practical, even experimental, nature of Rome's approach to the East (Sartre 2001). Phoenicia was no exception. The insecurity in the eastern Mediterranean, the contradictory and threatening political ambitions (between Ptolemies and Seleucids, with the countless wars in Syria), the decline of Seleucid authority, and the greater independence of cities (symbolized by minting coins; see Lorber 2015) all led to Pompey's annexation of Syria in 64 bc. In accordance with its habits, Rome focused on the network of cities, notably the port cities of Phoenicia, entrusting the rest of the territory to client princes (Sartre 2001).

Rome's Footprint in Phoenicia

When Antiochus IV died in 164 BC, Seleucid Syria entered a period of turbulence: crises, wars, and usurpations meant the cities gained more independence, to which the coinage and local eras testify. Some outside groups also benefited from these troubles, notably Arabs such as the Ituraeans, who created an independent principality in central Bekaa at the end of the second century (Aliquot 1999; 2003), and the Nabataeans, who formed a state during the third century at the borders of the Hasmonean kingdom. Rome, since the Peace of Apamea in 188 BC, had been a discreet partner on the Syrian chessboard and in 168, it imposed the agreement of Eleusis (in Egypt) on Antiochus IV, drastically limiting his sphere of influence. After 164, Rome redoubled its focus on the area but did not intervene militarily before 65/64, even when the city of Antioch asked for protection from Tigranes II of Armenia (an ally of Mithridates), who took over all of northern Syria, including Tripoli and Byblos. Tigranes finally left Syria in 69, precipitating the intervention of Rome, which feared both Mithridates taking control and the scourge of piracy on the Syrian coast. Rome then based its hegemony on the grid of Syrian and Phoenician cities, which formed the backbone of the new province. The advantages the province was granted—such as the *asylia* and the extension of its territories—were all confirmed and a new era began in Syria and in Phoenicia. Despite the upheavals linked to the civil war between Antony and Octavian, Rome brought this region a stability that had been lacking for more than a century.

Without going into the details of events, what mark did Rome leave on Phoenician territory? As elsewhere in the empire, Rome built roads, strengthened defenses, ensured a military presence, and embellished cities. As Sartre (2001, 639) has well shown, the empire marked the apogee of the Greek, or better Graeco-Roman, city. Of particular importance for Phoenicia was Augustus's founding of the Colonia Augusta Iulia Felix Beyrtus (Plin., *HN* 5.78; see Sartre 2001, 646) probably in 15/14 BC, encompassing a vast territory including the sanctuary of Heliopolis-Baalbek. The Romans also ensured the entrenchment of the Graeco-Roman institutional model, even though epigraphic evidence corroborating this view is not as plentiful as we might like. This model tended to increase emulation among cities, even rivalry, notably between Tyre and Sidon. To gain favor, cities willingly took sides in imperial succession struggles, but also suffered the consequences. In a continuation of the Hellenistic period, the cities expressed the desire to cultivate their own identity, their traditions, and their heritage. Their foundation legends were displayed, in particular on coins, as were the great figures of the mythological past, and thus promoted local features within the framework of a globalized Graeco-Roman *koine*.

Rome's mark can also be seen in the monumentalization of urban centers and great shrines. Thus Tyre, celebrated as the metropolis of Carthage, Utica, Leptis, and Gades, became the center of the imperial cult in the Eparchy of Phoenicia (Sartre 2001, 727–728). Wealthy through its trades and crafts (such as the production of Tyrian purple) and equipped with two dynamic ports, Tyre built an immense hippodrome not far from the necropolis with its imposing funerary monuments. Tyre also asserted itself as a cultural and intellectual center, although probably less than its rival Beirut, which was home to a highly renowned legal school. Among many scholars, we can mention Hadrian, a disciple of Herodes Atticus, who was originally from Tyre and studied in Athens. He became such a renowned rhetorician (Philostr., *VS*, *Hadrian* 10) that he was chosen to hold the chair of rhetoric in Athens. During his first speech, he said to the audience, "Once again letters have come from Phoenicia" (Bonnet 2018). In the second century AD, Philo of Byblos also displayed this Phoenician "pride" behind the shadow of Rome, in which "national" traditions claimed greater antiquity, prestige, and even authenticity than the Greek "canon" (Baumgarten 1981). Yet it is language and practices related to human–divine relations

that undoubtedly provide the most evidence of change during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Reshaping the Religious Landscape

Contrary to what we observe in Syria with the Tetrapolis, the low density of Phoenician habitat made the creation of Graeco-Macedonian "colonies" nearly impossible (Millar 1983; Cohen 2006). On the other hand, various cities changed name, such as Akko, renamed Ptolemais, or Beirut, designated Laodicea of Canaan (Cohen 2006). Control over a territory also happens through toponymy, inscribing royal power in the landscape in a lasting way. That control is also translated in the building and decoration of highly symbolic places for rulers, such as sanctuaries. In this network of sacred places, both local communities and political authorities were involved.

Since the Persian era, these sites of worship had been the place for the devotions of local rulers, their families, and loved ones, as well as elites, such as in Bustan esh-Sheikh (fig. 44.1) (Stucky 2005). Within the shelter of these divine powers, the regime in power constructed its legitimacy and displayed its pomp and liberality, as indicated by the multiple copies of Bodashart, king of Sidon's founding inscription for a sanctuary (which should probably be dated to ca. 500 bc and which sometimes mention his son and successor. *KAI* 15–16; on the dating of the kings of Sidon in connection with the inscriptions, see Amadasi Guzzo 2018). These shrines were also visited by foreign kings: the pharaohs, in particular, at Byblos since the second millennium, and still in the Hellenistic era, at Bustan esh-Sheikh, which received an offering by Hakor (396–383), Pharaoh of the 29th Dynasty (three altars with an Egyptian dedication; Stucky 2005, 271–272, plate 25). Similarly, around 200 bc, Antiochus III and his wife Laodice addressed themselves in Greek to the divine titulary of the sanctuary (Stucky 2005, 323, plate 33). Sanctuaries thus constituted places of social and cultural mixing where, during panegyrics, the population would gather and share sacrificial meat, gestures, speeches, and emotions. This reinforced the social bond while sanctioning existing hierarchies. Sanctuaries also played a role as commercial centerss: they were often large landowners, willingly served as banks for deposits and loans, and were successful businesses involving artisans, traders, and believers. How, in Hellenistic and Roman times, were Phoenician sanctuaries extended and adorned? How did they mark the landscape? And how do they reveal relations between communities of believers and rulers? (Aliquot 2009).

FIGURE 44.1. The Bustan esh-Sheikh sanctuary (© Corinne Bonnet).

Some sanctuaries were located in urban centers near the shore while others were built on the periphery of town or even far outside (Briquel-Chatonnet 2005). For Tyre, two Melqart shrines are known: one on the island, the other on the mainland in Palaityros. In Sidon, the funeral inscription of Eshmunazar II, who probably died in the last years of the sixth century bc (*KAI* 14; Amadasi Guzzo 2018), mentions a place of worship in Sidon-at-the-Sea and another in Sidon-at-the-Mountain, that of Bustan esh-Sheikh (fig. 44.1). These two examples show that within a given territory, the presence of the gods spread throughout and created communication networks between center and periphery, city and hinterland, and sea and mountain. The easily accessible area of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon also housed sanctuaries, called "high places," using a term from the Old Testament. This means that these shrines were located up high in mountainous and suggestive places where believers thought they could get closer to the gods. The regions of Sidon, and that of Beirut with its extension toward the Heliopolis temple, illustrate in a particularly suggestive way the transformations particular to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The inscription on the sarcophagus of Eshmunazor II of Sidon shows that the Sidonian cult landscape included two cultural poles, Sidon-on-the-sea, with sanctuaries of the couple formed by the Baal of Sidon (probably Eshmun) and Astarte, and Sidon-of-the-mountain, with the same divine couple and specific connotations linked to the natural spring there (Stucky 1984; 1993; 2005). In these places, the tutelary gods watched over the entire community, its well-

being, and that of its descendants. Families were particularly honored at Bustan esh-Sheikh, starting with the royal family; the gods, linked to the beneficial spring water, were invoked to protect children. The first building at this prestigious place of worship probably dates back to the sixth century bc. It underwent spectacular development at the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries, with the construction of a monumental podium on the hillside. Various orants, offering bearers, musicians, dancers, kourotrophos in limestone, then in Greek marble from around 480 bc, bear witness to the eclecticism of cultural references, sometimes Cypro-Anatolian, sometimes Egyptian, sometimes Persian, Assyrian, and Greek, even in the architecture. At the beginning of the fourth century, an amphiprostyle marble temple, built in the Ionic order and endowed with propylaea of the same style, was built. It was thus the Greek reference, even Attic, that dominated well before the arrival of Alexander. The famous Tribune of Eshmun (fig. 44.2), which may very well date from this period (350 bc; see Stucky 1984; Bonnet 2014, 231–245), eloquently reveals the deep penetration of Greek aesthetic models.

FIGURE 44.2. The "Tribune d'Eshmun" (© Corinne Bonnet).

These changes did not, however, render obsolete traditional "Phoenician" elements of the representation of the divine, such as the symbol of the empty throne to evoke and invoke the presence of Astarte. After Alexander's conquest, the sanctuary of Bustan esh-Sheikh (fig. 44.1) continued to be important, even though paradoxically, Greek marble disappeared and local limestone once again became the preferred material, probably for economic reasons. Eshmun,

interpreted as Asclepius, was the recipient of about twenty inscriptions in Greek dated between the first century bc and the second century ad. The conquest of Alexander was not, therefore, a forceful break with the past; the changes to the "indigenous" cultural fabric were neither immediate nor destructive. The insertion of Asclepius into this landscape, which also seems to have made room for Apollo, Dionysus, Aphrodite, and others, enabled the Sidonians to integrate themselves into the Aegean *koine* and to foster their own cultures within it.

As for Beirut, it is interesting to look at the singular territorial connection between this maritime Roman colony and the Heliopolis sanctuary in Bekaa (Aliquot 2009, 39–43, 120–125, 191–226; Hošek 2012). Until the Hellenistic period, Berytos was a port city of secondary importance, subject first to the Ptolemies, then the Seleucids. Renamed Laodicea "mother of Canaan," probably under Antiochus IV in the second quarter of the second century bc, it enjoyed relative economic prosperity as evidenced by the establishment of a trading center at Delos. A seat for urban sanctuaries, which remain poorly known today, Berytos was probably at that time linked with the mountain sanctuary outside the city, Deir el-Qalaa. The founding of a Roman colony at Berytos was Augustus's initiative (it was even the only Augustan colony in the Near East). This led settlers from Rome and Italy to come, who mixed with the local population to varying degrees. However, this civic territory of the colony profoundly modified the landscape of the Phoenician city by integrating two distinct and distant geographical spaces: the port city and its surroundings in the Bekaa Plain, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Heliopolis community as its focal point, with Mount Lebanon between these two poles.

Yet this spatial discontinuity ended up generating original cultural dynamics. In Heliopolis, the Roman monumental sanctuary probably replaced an earlier and more modest place of worship managed by the Ituraean tetrarchs. The mark of Rome, and thus the emperor, made itself visible and gave considerable influence to the sanctuary and to the entire colony, which served as an interface between Rome, "Phoenicia," and powerful neighbors such as Herod. The Heliopolis sanctuary, annexed after colonization and invested with a strong ideological purpose, largely influenced the neighboring regions. It ended up serving as a religious link between the two poles of this colonial territory. The veneration of the Heliopolitan gods also contributed to the construction of a colonial identity, since the Berytians of the diaspora promoted them as the colony's "trademark production."

These two cases show the complexity of the dynamics at work in redefining the religious landscapes of Hellenistic and Roman Phoenicia (Bonnet 2019). At first, we can perceive slow changes that had already begun before Alexander's arrival, while in Roman times, we see the advent of a new political and social order taking hold in cities and hinterlands. Roman domination was accompanied by the construction of a network of public spaces clearly rooted in local beliefs and at the same time, activating a series of connections between local authorities (political and religious) and the empire. This network thus materialized Rome's footprint on the territory, but also the lasting prevalence of ancestral usages, in constant dialogue with Graeco-Roman ways of doing things.

Beyond "Hellenization" and "Romanization": *Koine* and Micro-identities

The concept of "Hellenization," through which the Hellenistic Near East is still often read, owes much to J. G. Droysen (Payen 2005, 5–82). Focused on the construction of German unity, he wanted to see in Alexander the providential man who would allow Greece to go beyond the primitive stage of the *Kleinestaaterei* (the "fragmentation into small states") and make *Hellenismus* emerge, the epoch during which Hellenism spread throughout the entire

Mediterranean. Droysen envisaged Hellenization as a "fusion" (*Verschmelzung*) between the dominant Greek culture and the "conquered" and "civilized" eastern cultures. Sometimes read through the lens of colonialism and its scenario of unilateral "acculturation," and sometimes revisited as decolonization through the prism of resistance and rejection, the cultural interactions of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East need to be understood today with new concepts (see notably Woolf 1998; 2011). The challenge for historians is to flexibly link the "global" level of the Graeco-Roman Empire, using Veyne's vision (Veyne 2005), with the "local" level of "micro-identities" (Whitmarsh 2010). Whether we speak of *métissage*, creolization, middle ground, or piecing together identity, what stands out is the creativity of the processes of cultural interaction, which cannot be reduced to a simple relation of force between the dominant and the dominated. This does not mean having a naive vision of cultural dialogue but rather of insisting on the powerful effects of adjustments specific to all cultural "ecology," following M. Sahlins (1985; 1995; 2008).

The weight of politics was clear at Tyre during the conquest. Alexander asserted his "natural" legitimacy, backed by kinship with Heracles. He thus mixed himself into the symbolic network linking the king of Tyre to his presumed ancestor, Melqart, the "King of the City." After the siege, Heracles's implantation in the city was done with much pomp, but it did not lead to the disappearance of Melqart's cult, since at least one dedication to Melqart in Phoenician dating from ca. 100 bc (AO 30.084) has been preserved. As for Sidon, in a Greek honorary inscription from ca. 200 bc, Diotimos, a notable probably from the fallen Sidonian royal family, celebrates his victorious return from Argolid where he won the chariot race in the prestigious Nemean Games (Bonnet 2014, 205, 206, 251–256, 260–264, 347, 348). He highlights the kinship between Sidon and the Greeks who crowned him through the figures of Agenor and Cadmos, who served as links between the two shores of the Mediterranean. A strong element of Sidonian micro-identity was promoted here, emphasized in a global context, to support the argument of the Phoenicians' agonistic and cultural superiority. The shared knowledge about their origins enabled the Phoenicians to forge a "patriotic" discourse during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, cast in a Graeco-Roman mold of thought. Far from being subjected to a "Hellenization" or a "Romanization" from above, the Phoenicians show their agency in a "cultural game" from below. This enabled them to use Hellenism as a framework within which their own traditions could resound (Bowersock 1990).

Fergus Millar has rightly stressed the peculiarity of the Phoenician case in terms of "Hellenization" (Millar 1983). While the documentation from the Hellenistic period is rather poor, it nevertheless enables us to begin to grasp the dynamics involved (Bonnet 2014) in reshaping the political, economic, and cultural landscapes of Phoenicia. Less affected by the Greek diaspora than Syria, Phoenicia went from Persian to Graeco-Macedonian to Roman tutelage, without experiencing the slightest process of territorial unification. The links with the Punic West constitutive of Tyrian identity gradually weakened, but did not disappear until the destruction of Carthage in 146 bc.

The opening up to the Greek *koine* then the networks of the Roman Empire, in fact, encouraged multiple exchanges and a strong mobility of people, ideas, and models. The capacity for adaptation and compromise, in short, the thinking of the middle ground, was at work in Phoenicia before the fourth century bc, especially on the seafront. The Roman period, better documented by sources, reveals more diffuse transformations that affected cities and the countryside, institutions, and social hierarchies. These changes had an important impact on material and symbolic landscapes, even though the use of Latin remained limited and Greek was predominant. As everywhere in the empire, the mark of Graeco-Roman *paideia* was deep, to the point that the Phoenician idiom finally disappears from our radars in the first century ad, except for a few legends on coinage. In the end, the Phoenician cities—in particular, Berytos,

the Augustean then Severian Roman colony with its prestigious law school—played the game of an advantageous "globalization." They were able to benefit from this process, without renouncing their own cultural heritage, and without closing off and focusing only on their cultural uniqueness, which would have isolated them.

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CHAPTER 45

HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN BAALBEK AND THE BEKAA

SIMONE EID PATUREL

Introduction

The Bekaa Valley runs north–south between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges to the east and west, respectively, and forms around a third of the territory of modern Lebanon. The fertile valley lies at an average altitude of 900–1,000 m above sea level. Today the largest population center is the city of Baalbek, ancient Heliopolis, which lies 85 km northeast of Beirut and 90 km north of Damascus. Baalbek lies at the watershed of two major rivers—the Litany that flows south and the Orontes that flows north—eventually draining into the Mediterranean north of Antakya, ancient Antioch.

This article explores the city of Baalbek-Heliopolis and the Bekaa in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The limited historical evidence presents a picture of Hellenistic kingdoms competing for control of the valley, followed by the rise of the Ituraeans, a group that may have origins in Arabia. Contrary to earlier work, recent archaeology demonstrates that the sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitan developed only from the last quarter of the first century BC, before becoming a major Roman sanctuary site of empire-wide significance. Inscriptions from the Bekaa and the archaeological record from Niha and Hosn Niha show a pattern of Roman colonial life that could have been drawn from anywhere in the empire.

Hellenistic Kingdoms, the Ituraeans, and Roman Authority in the Bekaa

The Bekaa Valley, then known as Coele-Syria, lay on the border between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires and was an object of desire for both leading to six wars between 274 and 168 BC. The location of the frontier between the two empires in the early Hellenistic is uncertain; Polybius (5.46) reports that there were two Ptolemaic fortifications in the southern Bekaa at Brochi and Gerrha, located on an east–west line across the valley. The location of Brochi is lost, but Gerrha is frequently identified with the later Chalcis, and both have been identified with modern Anjar, located on the eastern edge of the Bekaa on the Beirut–Damascus road. However, the extant ancient remains at Anjar are of an Umayyad city founded in the eighth century, while 3 km southwest lies the Roman temple at Majdal Anjar. Antiochus III ruled the Seleucid kingdom from 222 to 187 BC and expanded its boundaries considerably through conquest. He fought three campaigns against Coele-Syria (Pol. 5.46.5, 5.60.2–3, 5.61.3, 5.61.5–5.62.1) in 221 BC, 217 BC, and finally gaining control in 198 BC, after a decisive battle at Panium. Antiochus's later campaigns against Asia Minor and Greece prompted the intervention of Rome and his ultimate defeat at Magnesia in 191 BC (Liv. 37.37–44). Coele-Syria remained under Seleucid control under Antiochus's sons Seleucus IV and Antiochus IV, notwithstanding the heavy war reparations demanded by Rome. After the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BC, Seleucid authority declined rapidly.

The Ituraeans were the dominant group in the area corresponding to modern Lebanon prior to the arrival of Rome. Who were they? The most prominent idea is that the Ituraeans were a nomadic group that originated in northern Arabia and settled in the Bekaa Valley prior to the foundation of a principality. Plutarch (24.10–14) suggests that Alexander the Great campaigned against "Arabs" in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains leading some authors to associate them with the Ituraeans (Grainger 1991, 19), Aliquot (1999–2003, 171), however, argues that use of the term "Arab" may have been an anachronism by ancient authors trying to draw parallels between the conquests of Pompey and Alexander the Great. Strabo (*Geog*. 16.2.18) provides the first direct reference to the Ituraeans, famously describing them as mountain-dwelling "robbers" who harassed the farmers of the plains. Ancient authors are divided on the origin of the Ituraeans; Strabo, Eutropius, Orosius, and Cassius Dio identify them as Arabs, while Pliny the Elder, Appian and Vibius describe them as Syrians and Josephus provides no ethic description (Kropp 2013, 21–22). Even ancient authors who describe the Ituraeans as "Arabs" may have been referring to their pastoral lifestyle rather than a true Arabian origin (Kropp 2013, 21–22; Aliquot 1999–2003, 182). Some modern scholars have used Safaitic graffiti from southern Hauran and the northern Arabian Desert as support for an Arabian origin for the Ituraeans (Ghadban 1971; Milik 1985; MacDonald 1986), but unfortunately there is no evidence that ties these inscriptions to the Ituraeans (Aliquot 1999–2003, 179; Kropp 2013, 26–27 n. 152). Iconography on coins issued by the Ituraean tetrarchs may provide some evidence of a link with images of Athena recalling the Hellenized form of the Arabian goddess Allāt, an association found elsewhere, and Dioskouroi possibly linked to twin Arab gods (Kropp 2013, 235–236; Aliquot 1999–2003, 186). The tower tomb at Hermel in the northern Bekaa is dated to the first century bc and given the location could be linked to the Ituraean tetrarchs (Kropp 2013, 208–216). This tomb has a pyramidal top that can be linked to the *nefesh* style of funerary monument associated with Arabic-speaking nomads. There are other theories including a link to the "Arameans," a Bronze Age group from upper Mesopotamia and Syria associated with the use of the Aramaic language. There is good evidence from a coin of the tetrarch Lysanias, which is inscribed with two Aramaic letters, that the Ituraeans used Aramaic, but this is unsurprising given its widespread regional use. In conclusion, there is no definitive evidence for the origin of the Ituraeans.

A coin minted at Chalcis in 73/72 bc by Ptolemy, son of Menneus, provides the earliest evidence for the Ituraean Principality (Seyrig 1950, 48). Josephus provides an account of the conquest of the Levant by Pompey in 64/63 bc in *Antiquities of the Jews* as well as information about the Ituraean Principality and its rulers. At the time of the conquest, Ptolemy is reported to have paid 1,000 talents to Pompey to secure his kingdom by a scornful Josephus (14.39). However, this should properly be interpreted as the establishment of the Ituraeans as a client kingdom of Rome (Kropp 2013, 27). Ptolemy was killed in 40 bc during a Parthian invasion and the principality was left to his son Lysanias (Josephus 14.330). Roman politics then intervened with Lysanius killed by Antony at the request of Cleopatra, with the territory or perhaps its revenues given to her children (Josephus 15.91–92). After Actium, the principality was leased to Zenodorus (Josephus 15.344) in 30 bc, but he was deposed in 24 or 23 bc in response to his raiding of caravans near Damascus (Josephus 15.344–346). The coins of the Ituraean rulers bear titles "tetrarch" and "high priest" (Wroth 1899, XXIII–XXIV). The title tetrarch was Greek and given to a subordinate ruler of a province; the use of "high priest" implies the ruler also had a religious function (Jones 1931, 265), Kropp (2013, 30) suggests the priesthood must have been tied to a sanctuary, although whether this was associated with Baalbek-Heliopolis or with Chalcis itself is unclear.

Why was Zenodorus deposed? Surely it was not just isolated incidents of banditry and something closer to a full-scale revolt that prompted Rome to divide the Bekaa Valley and add

the northern half to the new Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus (Paturel 2019, 73; Millar 1993, 36). After the removal of Zenodorus, Josephus (15.344) records that his territory was handed to Herod the Great, and so it is possible that the Bekaa and Heliopolis were briefly under Herodian control, prior to the formation of the *colonia* in 15 bc (Jerome 191.3). Veterans of two legions were settled, the Fifth Legio Macedonica and Eighth Legio Augusta, as can be seen from coins issued in Berytus. The northern Bekaa was later separated into its own *colonia* under Septimius Severus as indicated by Heliopolis issuing its own coinage (Sawaya 2009, 147–149). Control of the southern Bekaa after the formation of the *colonia* is uncertain, and it may have been granted to Emesa (Cass. Dio 59.12.2). Chalcis was given to Agrippa II from 50–53 bc, after which it was exchanged for a larger territory (Jos., *BI* 11.12.1, 8). It seems likely the southern Bekaa was absorbed into the Roman province of Syria on or before the death of Agrippa II in AD 92/93.

Hellenistic Baalbek and the Bekaa

Evidence for Hellenistic activity, settlement or religious, has proved elusive. There has been little or no systematic archaeological survey work done, which would certainly transform the understanding of the Bekaa in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Dar (1993) excavated a series of settlement sites around Mount Hermon at the southern end of the Bekaa. Ptolemaic and Seleucid coins were recovered indicating Hellenistic occupation. He made the controversial claim that these sites were Ituraean, supported by the use of distinctive pottery and the presence of Safaitic inscriptions in the foothills of Mount Hermon (Dar 1993, iii, 17). The problem is that Safaitic inscriptions cannot be directly linked to the Ituraeans, and the core of Dar's argument is based on historical, rather than archaeological, evidence (Myers 2010, 81–82). Evidence for Hellenistic religious activity may remain buried under later structures and many Roman temple sites share topographical features such as height and nearby water courses, suggesting that the choice of location may reflect earlier religious activity (Steinsapir 2 005, 85–87).

Occupation at Baalbek-Heliopolis dates to Pottery Neolithic A or possibly Pre-Pottery Neolithic B and the late eighth or early seventh millennium bc (van Ess 2006b, 19). Evidence for continuous occupation from then through to the Hellenistic and early Roman period is provided by the so-called Deep Trench dug in the 1950s/1960s to examine the foundations of the Great Altar in the temple of Jupiter-Heliopolitan and reexamined by van Ess (2006a, 99–120). The key observation is that the later temple sanctuary was built on top of an ancient tell. The remains of late Hellenistic or early Roman houses were found north of the small altar suggesting that domestic activity continued on the site of the later temple until the end of the Hellenistic (Rheidt 2006, 221). One surprise is the relative lack of Hellenistic coinage found at Baalbek; a small number of Seleucid coins have been recovered but only three Ituraean coins—two of Ptolemy Menneus and one of Zenodorus (Sawaya 2005, 149).

The traditional picture of the development of the sanctuary of Jupiter-Heliopolitan is presented by Ragette (1980, 27–39) reflecting the largely unpublished thinking of Kalayan, who excavated the site in the 1960s. In this picture, the sanctuary develops continuously from the second millennium bc beginning with a rock-cut altar. A glacis and tower found in the main courtyard of the later temple were identified as forming an enclosure for an earlier pre-Hellenistic temple, which was later extended in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This picture is incorrect and there is no evidence for a religious sanctuary on the site before the late

Hellenistic period. Features such as the glacis can be explained as part of the defenses of the tell.

The Roman temple of Jupiter-Heliopolitan is constructed reusing a high podium, 14.3 m above the plain (van Ess 2006b, 22), interpreted as a Hellenistic structure. The blocks of the earlier structure are faced with the drafted margin style and hence were clearly intended to be seen (von Gerkan 1937, 46). The facing of the earlier podium changes at the eastern end, 63.1 m from the western end, with the facing stopping for the remainder of the podium (Kropp and Lohmann 2011, 40). Hence, the Hellenistic podium was T-shaped with wing walls that were later entirely removed when the temple was remodeled (Kropp and Lohmann 2011, 42). The presence of a T-shaped podium may have implied that the temple itself was also intended to be T-shaped. For this, there are two possible parallels: the Temple of Baal-Shamin at Sī' which had towers either side of the temple front, and the Temple of Jerusalem, which had a T-shaped plan according to Josephus (*BI* 5.5.5). However, a T-shaped temple does not need a T-shaped podium.

The drafted margin style of the facing blocks is significant and closely parallels that used in Herod's extension of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, with even the course heights being identical at 1.11 m. This drove Kropp and Lohmann (2011) to conclude that the Hellenistic podium was Herodian and that potentially the same stonemasons were used as in Jerusalem. Drafted margin masonry is a hallmark of Herodian structures, and there are at least five examples. It is also possible that the use of the drafted margin style is a direct transfer from Augustan Rome where it was used on the Temple of Mars Ultor (Kropp and Lohmann 2011, 45). The involvement of Herod the Great in such a project is certainly plausible either as an act of euergetism or during a hypothetical period of Herodian control from 24 to 15 bc. This implies that the Hellenistic podium was constructed in the last quarter of the first century bc.

Lohmann (2014, 66) was able to identify an early courtyard centered on the small altar, that was removed when the Roman sanctuary was built. Collart, Coupel, and Kalayan (1977, 99) also concluded that the small altar may be Hellenistic. To date, no evidence of a Hellenistic temple has ever been found including any spolia used in later structures. This is at least suggestive that the temple itself was never completed and that a decision to remodel the site occurred partway through construction.

The Roman Bekaa

Modern Lebanon, including the Bekaa, has one of the highest densities of Roman religious architecture anywhere, so it is unsurprising that this has been the focus of a number of studies including that of Krencker and Zschietzschmann (1938) and the more recent Aliquot (2009). Krencker and Zschietzschmann recorded the standing remains in detail, but few of the sites have been fully excavated. Hence, the local context of many of these sites is unknown. Niha, Hosn Niha, and Baalbek have been subject to more extensive excavation and survey.

Roman Niha and Hosn Niha

The modern village of Niha lies in a steep-sided side valley running down from Mount Lebanon into the Bekaa, around 25 km southwest of Baalbek. Above the modern village lies the sanctuary, the largest in the Bekaa apart from Baalbek. The site likely fell within the territory of the *colonia* after its foundation in 15 BC and transferred to the *colonia* centered at Heliopolis

after its foundation under Septimius Severus (Paturel 2019, 165). The sanctuary contains four structures: a platform, the Small Temple (B), the Great Temple (A), and a small ruined building to the northwest that may be where an architectural model of Temple A was found (Aliquot 2009, 302–303). The platform is located close to perennial springs, and an offering table and a pedestal carved with a figure were found during the excavation of the area (Yasmine 2009, 143). The figure has been identified as either Atargatis (Aliquot 2009, 303) or a Tyche (Yasmine 2009, 143). The platform has been variously dated to the Hellenistic period and as being contemporary with the two temples. The Small Temple faces south and is a tetrastyle prostylos with a length of 27.5 m and a width of 12 m (Yasmine 2005, 308). Like many temples in the area, the cella interior contained a raised adyton (Aliquot 2009, 302). The temple was likely originally an ante temple in design, constructed in the first century BC (Yasmine 2005, 308–309); later a propylon was added. The Great Temple is another tetrastyle prostylos constructed across the river from the Small Temple on a steep slope. The Great Temple is much larger at 18 m × 41 m with a 17 m podium staircase constructed in three flights (Aliquot 2009, 300; Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938, 106–115). Inside the cella was a raised adyton with two flights of stairs leading to it and similar in design to the so-called Baccus temple at Baalbek-Heliopolis (Aliquot 2009, 301). An entrance to a temple vault can be seen on the right of the adyton as well as a bas-relief panel with three figures, although only a priest can be identified with certainty (Fani 2009, 154). The cella also had a staircase to the upper levels of the temple. The Great Temple was likely constructed in the second century (Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938, 106–115; Will 1966, 729; Freyberger 1999, 573).

While the temples are undoubtedly important, it is the associated inscriptions and bas-reliefs recovered from Niha that provide significant insight. Eighteen inscriptions are recorded from Niha (Rey-Coquais 1967), split evenly between Greek and Latin with some bilingual inscriptions. A bas-relief carving of a priest stands on the left of the podium and is illustrated in figure 45.1. The tunic of the priest is carved with two figures, likely Hadaranes and Atargatis, given other inscriptions from the site. The carving could date from as early as the Antonine period or as late as the early third century (Freyberger 1999, 573). Another priest, Tiberius, dedicated the carving to Narkisos, son of Kasios and an honorary council member at Heliopolis. Narkisos and his father have names that suggest a family of local origin (*IGLS* 2935; Rey-Coquais 1967, 201–202).

FIGURE 45.1. At the entrance to the Great Temple at Niha stands a bas-relief of a priest and an inscription dedicated to Narkisos (copyright: Simone Eid Paturel).

Two inscriptions were dedicated to Hochmaea, a priestess of Hadaranes. The first was on a Cippus recovered from the Small Temple with bas-relief on two faces, a veiled woman and Hadaranes standing between two animals (*IGLS* 2928; Rey-Coquais 1967, 196–198). The inscription says that Hochmaea was a virgin priestess of Hadaranes who took a vow of abstinence from bread for twenty years. A second limestone stele also contains an inscription dedicated to Hochmaea and may be her tombstone; it was set up by veteran Sextus Allius Iullus (*IGLS* 2929; Rey-Coquais 1967, 198). The inscription is bilingual in Latin and Greek; it describes Hochmaea as a priestess of Dea Syria in Latin and Atargatis in Greek. Hence, it is likely that Hochmaea was a priestess of both Hadaranes and Atargatis.

Two further important inscriptions were recovered at Niha, the first of which was either a lintel or base set up by the *pagus Augustus* to Dea Syria (*IGLS* 2936; Rey-Coquais 1967, 202–203). Here the *pagus Augustus* probably refers to a group of Roman citizens who formed an association. The final inscription discussed here was set up by Gaius Claudius Marcellus for his four children, of which three can be identified: Candidus, Ménos, and Kéamos (*IGLS* 2940; Rey-Coquais 1967, 207). Four cone-shaped stylized monuments are carved into the stele above the names of the children and were probably meant to be *nefesh* monuments (Steinsapir 2005, 77).

In summary, Niha was an important sanctuary within the *colonia* of Berytus and later Heliopolis that was dedicated to Syrian deities Hadaranes and Atargatis. We see the same euergetism found in other locations across the Roman world, and people with indigenous names achieving positions of authority in the *colonia*. In the case of Marcellus, a Roman citizen,

we see him naming his children using both Roman and indigenous names, suggesting strong integration between descendants of veteran settlers and the local population.

Hosn Niha lies around 2.5 km farther up the valley from the village of Niha. The Roman sanctuary was surveyed by Krencker and Zschietzschmann (1938), Steinsapir (2005) and Yasmine (2005; 2006; 2009; 2013) and recent survey work by Newson and Young (2011; 2015) has revealed more information about the Roman village that lies southwest and northeast of the sanctuary site. A further non-classical sanctuary has been identified around 170 m southwest of the Roman sanctuary (Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938, 135–136; Newson and Young 2011; 2015).

The Roman sanctuary area consists of a spring, the Small Temple, the Large Temple, and a late Roman basilical church and is illustrated in figure 45.2. The Small Temple is 5.7 m × 5.6 m and is a distyle in antis Ionic temple with pronaos and cella and dated to the first century (Yasmine 2009, 138). The Large Temple is 14.35 m by 28.69 m in size and sits on a high podium 37 m in length (Yasmine 2005, 305; Aliquot 2009, 304). The building is a tetrastyle prostylos and bears a strong resemblance to the Great Temple at Niha, having a raised adyton and a staircase to the roof level. The Large Temple is believed to be second or third century in date. The non-classical shrine is a double sanctuary consisting of two rooms 7.8 m by 5.2 m, and 5.7 m by 3.75 m, both oriented northeast toward the Roman sanctuary (Newson and Young 2011, 264). In front of the northernmost room are the remains of two altars. Given the spatial relationship with the main Roman sanctuary, a Roman date can be assumed. It seems two deities were worshipped here and so Hadaranes and Atargatis are likely candidates. Newson and Young (2011, 274–275) conducted a field survey at Hosn Niha to identify the extent of the Roman village and identified the remains of several buildings. A number of tombs were also located at the western and northeastern ends of the site with four different types; rock-cut tombs, single cist burials, burials in sarcophagi, and simple inhumation burials (Yasmine 2005, 15–17; Newson and Young 2011, 267–274).

FIGURE 45.2. A view of the Roman sanctuary area at Hosn Niha (copyright: Simone Eid Paturel).

A small number of inscriptions have been found at Hosn Niha. One was associated with a 1 m square colonnaded monument of a type found at several sites in modern Lebanon (*IGLS* 2946; Rey-Coquais 1967, 210; Nordiguian 2005, 64–65). These square monuments have a statue niche on each side. Here the inscription records that it was set up to the local deity god Mifsenus by nine officials, four with Roman names including one veteran and five with Semitic names (Rey-Coquais 1967, 211). The inscription uses the name "vicus," in this context meaning a rural village that is the dependency of a city (Rey-Coquais 1987, 203).

Hosn Niha was a Roman village set amid an agricultural landscape, with a Roman sanctuary at its heart. Like Niha, it was a mixed settlement with citizens and non-citizens, veteran settlers and indigenous people.

The Double Transformation of Roman Baalbek-Heliopolis

The first completed Roman temple at Baalbek is the so-called Temple of the Muses, which sits in the same area as the much later round so-called Temple of Venus (Hoebel 2006, 161). This enigmatic temple is dated to around AD 1, based on the similarity of the stones in the podium and structures underneath the Great Court of the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitan (Wienholz 2006, 274). The temple is pseudoperipteral in style, for which there are parallels in Italy and Gaul

but not Syria. Nevertheless, the roof of the temple was flat and like other local temples, a staircase led up to the roof (Hoebel 2014, 25). The unique element of this temple is that it was built to be deliberately flooded on a seasonal basis as can be seen from the alluvium deposits (Hoebel 2006, 171). The temple was more likely dedicated to the Tyche or Gad of Baalbek-Heliopolis and hence associated with the springs that mark the start of the Litany and Orontes Rivers.

The Hellenistic podium of the Temple of Jupiter-Heliopolitan was already huge and dominated the landscape. Over the next three hundred years, the sanctuary grew to be one of the largest temple complexes anywhere in the Roman Empire. The decastyle Roman temple was constructed on the original Hellenistic podium, now with its wing walls removed. The podium stood 13.5 m above the Great Court and with columns 20 m high; the apex of the temple roof stood 40 m above the ground (Ward-Perkins 1981, 316). The podium was then extended and for aesthetic reasons used blocks measuring 16 m × 4 m × 4 m, with each weighing around 560 tons, although in the end it was never completed (Ragette 1980, 33). The sheer scale and ambition of the project points to empire-wide significance. The temple itself has been dated using a Greek graffito on a fallen column drum to ad 60 and the style of the columns is consistent with the Flavian period (Wienholz 2006, 274–275; Freyberger 1998, 63 n. 816).

The overarching design is one of a temple-court scheme, of which there are a number of examples in the Near East. However, examples in the Near East had a large court space with a temple placed within, often centrally like the Temple of Bel. At Baalbek, the Great Court lies in front of the temple on its podium, forming a long narrow space with the temple at one end. The closest precedents for this style are the Forum of Augustus and Temple of Mars-Ultor in Rome (Paturel 2019, 211–220).

One element of non-classical design is the two tower altars; the small altar noted earlier and the large altar. The large altar is a tower with five floors standing 18 m above the ground in the Great Court (Collart and Coupel 1951, 145). It has two flights of stairs in the north and south sides, meant to facilitate the movement of people up and down to the altar top. Towers are frequently an element of funerary and religious practice in the region, and a number of temples in Lebanon have tower altars, such as Hosn Soleiman, Sfiré, and Qalaat Fakra (Collart, Coupel, and Kalayan 1977, 105); however, none of these sites lies in the Bekaa and none have altars on the same scale. The presence of the tower altars points to elements of local religious practice taking place within a Roman space.

The construction of the remaining elements of the Temple of Jupiter-Heliopolitanus began around ad 75, spanned at least two hundred years, and was likely never fully finished (Wienholz 2006, 276, 283). The Great Court is illustrated in figure 45.3. The hexagonal forecourt is unique and not found anywhere else in Roman architecture (Brown 1939, 285). The date of the structure can be placed in the first half of the third century ad, based on the construction dates of the Great Court and the propylon. The origin of the design is unclear although hexagon motifs do appear on the ceiling of the peristyle of the so-called Temple of Bacchus where each hexagon surrounds a bust of a mythological figure (Ragette 1980, 113). The propylon was also constructed in the first half of the third century and was likely completed under Philip the Arab. The propylon contains three features that are typically Syrian: flanking towers, the arcuated lintel, and Syrian niches.

FIGURE 45.3. A panoramic view of the Great Court of the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus, including the reconstructed Large Altar (copyright: Guillaume Piolle/CC BY 3.0).

There are a number of other important public buildings at Baalbek-Heliopolis. The largest of these is the so-called Temple of Bacchus that lies south of the Temple of Jupiter-Heliopolitan with its axis parallel to it (Ragette 1980, 41). This temple may be overshadowed by its neighbor, but it is a major building in its own right, slightly larger than the Parthenon (Ragette 1980, 47). Construction was probably begun in the second half of the second century ad and may have continued into the third century. The Temple of Mercury was constructed on Sheikh Abdallah Hill, giving it long-distance visibility. A monumental stairway was provided and illustrated on coins of Philip the Arab, also implying a date of construction prior to ad 249. The existence of a monumental stairway may imply processions while van Ess et al. also established a link with a feast hall in the Bustan al-Khan area of the city (van Ess et al. 2005, 130–135; Wienholz 2006, 280–281). At least two other Roman temples were present in the city: the round so-called Temple of Venus built in the third century (Hoebel 2006, 161), and the Temple and Nymphaeum at Ras el-Ain (Périssé-Valéro and Lohmann 2014, 92–95), 1.5 km south-east of the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus. The Bustan al-Khan area also revealed a major bath complex that would have accommodated a large number of visitors to the city (Brünenberg 2009).

The late Roman history of Heliopolis is uncertain. We do know that at some point the two altars in the Great Court were demolished and replaced by a Christian basilica. Unfortunately, the basilica site was cleared with minimal recording.

In conclusion, the transformation of the city of Baalbek-Heliopolis occurred in two phases. The first phase lasted until the mid-second century, corresponding with the foundation of the *colonia* and driven primarily by Roman ideas with some more local innovations. The second phase after ad 150 was more Syrian in character, following the patterns seen elsewhere in the nearby cities of the Decapolis (Paturel 2019, 245–246).

The Heliopolitan Triad

The corpus of inscriptions recovered from the Bekaa provides a rich source for understanding life in *colonia*. There is too much material to cover here, but one issue that does need to be addressed is the so-called Heliopolitan Triad. Much previous work on the Heliopolitan deities has been done on the assumption of the antiquity of the cult and the associated sanctuary. Many authors have attempted to link the deities worshipped at Heliopolis—Jupiter, Mercury, and Venus Heliopolitanus—syncretically with Semitic deities, such as Hadad, Astarte, and Atargatis (Seyrig 1929; Hajjar 1977; Dussaud 1922). There is no evidence to support this, and there are no inscriptions that link Jupiter-Heliopolitanus and Hadad; moreover, Atargatis appears linked to Dea Syria and not Venus Heliopolitanus. Kropp (2009, 371–374) suggests that there may be links between Jupiter Heliopolitan and Ituraean Zeus and between Mercury Heliopolitan and

Ituraean Hermes. Even if these links hold, the iconography changed significantly in the Roman period; the tight-fitting robe and cuirass of Jupiter Heliopolitanus is a Roman creation and parallels a similar development for the Palmyrene deity Yarhibol (Dirven and Kaizer 2013).

Even without syncretism, is it possible that the Heliopolitan deities formed a fixed triad? There are inscriptions that link the three, such as those found associated with column bases in the propylon of the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus (*IGLS* 2711–2713; Rey-Coquais 1967, 43–49). There are also bas-relief carvings and coins that show all three Heliopolitan deities (Paturel 2019, 255–257). However, there are also monuments such as the six multisided altars showing two or more deities from the Heliopolitan "triad" but alongside other deities (Paturel 2019, 257). As an example, consider the octagonal altar from Fiki that shows Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Venus, and Mercury alongside the moon god and the sun god and other deities (Jidejian 1975, 47). Hence the Heliopolitan deities are not always pictured as a triad. The parallels to the so-called Palmyrene Triad examined by Kaizer are clear. Kaizer (2016, 18) prefers to use the term "divine constellation" to describe groups of deities that form more fluid associations than a fixed pantheon. Hence the Heliopolitan Triad is a modern invention and an oversimplification of a much more complex picture in which deity groups evolved and changed through time.

Conclusions

The Hellenistic Bekaa is known historically to have been a desirable territory that was fought over by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties until the waning of their power. The Ituraeans, a group that may have originated in the Arabian Peninsula, then came to control the Bekaa with a capital at Chalcis in the first century BC. Unfortunately, the archaeological record is almost silent, largely because of the lack of systematic survey.

Contrary to much earlier scholarship, archaeology points to the abrupt development of the sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus immediately prior to the foundation of the *colonia* in 15 BC, into which Heliopolis was incorporated. The temple was then under continual development for three hundred years or more, eventually becoming one of the largest Roman temple complexes anywhere. The city accumulated public architecture consistent with what might be expected for a major religious center and city. Elsewhere in the Roman Bekaa, the sites at Niha and Hosn Niha paint a picture familiar across the Roman world with examples of eugertism by veterans, citizens, and non-citizens seeking advancement within Roman society.

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CHAPTER 46

MOUNT HERMON

JULIEN ALIQUOT

The Near East is characterized on its Mediterranean side by the presence of a mountain range made up of a double alignment of massifs and plateaus separated by a depression running from the Ghab Plain to the Gulf of ʿAqaba. From the top of its 2,814 m, Mount Hermon (Jabal al-Shaykh, Jabal Ḥaramūn) stands out clearly within this ensemble, although it only corresponds to the southern extension of Anti-Lebanon. Huge, isolated, and even sacralized, it is a small but distinctive region in itself, where climate influence, relief structure, and soil conditions fostered the development of villages, away from major cities and routes.

On the whole, the area has remained ignored in the grand narratives of Syrian history. At the southern foot of the mountain, close to the Panion shrine and the headwaters of the Jordan River, the Seleucid king Antiochos III gained a decisive victory over the Ptolemies in 198 bc, after which he and his heirs recovered all Syria. The rulers of Antioch, however, quickly saw competitors in the region. In the second century bc the Ituraeans, who have been identified since antiquity with a people of Arab robbers (Aliquot 1999–2003; Myers 2010, cf. Aliquot 2011), managed to form principalities throughout Lebanon. Mount Hermon fell for that reason into the hands of the Mennaid tetrarchs of Chalcis ad Libanum and Abilene until the advent of the Roman Empire. These unruly leaders were allies of Rome for a while only. After their ousting, the southern part of the mountain and the city of Caesarea Philippi (Paneas) belonged from time to time to the principalities of the Herodian kings in the first century ad, whereas its northern part was divided between Sidon and Damascus in the reign of Tiberius. As a result, three cities shared Mount Hermon among themselves from the end of the first century ad: Sidon to the west, Damascus to the east, and Caesarea Paneas to the south. All were included in the Roman province of Syria until ad 193, then in the Severan province of Syria Phoenice. The situation remained stable until the early Byzantine period, when the two minor cities of Zenonopolis and Justinianopolis were founded by removing Rakhla and Barkousa (Burqush) from the territories of Sidon in Phoenice Maritima and of Damascus in Phoenice Libanensis.

For a long time, the mountain was of some interest to the west only because it bordered the Holy Land. Moreover, an ambiguous reputation for wildness and holiness hung on its snow-capped peak. "One says that there is on its summit a famous temple used by the pagans for their cult, facing Paneas and the Lebanon," as Saint Jerome (ad 347–420) noticed (*Onom. s.v.* Aermon). Following the example of the church father, the travelers and scholars who have climbed the slopes of Mount Hermon since the beginning of the nineteenth century were seeking biblical souvenirs. Yet they discovered many Roman temples without necessarily having looked for them (fig. 46.1).

FIGURE 46.1. Roman temple at ʿAyn Hirsha, Lebanon. © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma, IGLS Archive 2003.

They collected Greek inscriptions too. These texts, which mention not only holy places, but also villages, are a valuable source of information on the communities who settled there during the first centuries of the Christian Era. Archaeological missions have also provided interesting pieces of evidence on this point since the 1960s. In what follows, all these data will be taken into account to put Mount Hermon back in the history of Hellenistic and Roman Syria (Aliquot 2008a, for an overview of this topic; Aliquot 2008b, hereafter *IGLS* XI, for the epigraphic corpus of the area; in a broader perspective, see also Aliquot 2009).

The Sacred Mountain

Hermon, Disgusting Fruit Mountain, Siryon, Tur Talga, Jabal al-Shaykh, Jabal al-Thalj, etc.: all these names and phrases reflect the multiple features attributed to Mount Hermon since antiquity. The massif was also likened to a juniper-mountain, a snow-mountain, a shield, and a giant. Above all, it had the particularity of being one of the sacred mountains of the ancient Near East.

As early as the late Bronze Age Mount Hermon was invoked as a full-fledged deity in treaties between the Hittites, who then dominated Syria as far as Lebanon, and the dynasts of Amurru established in the ʿAkkār Plain. According to the mention of the "mountain of Baal-Hermon" in the Book of Judges (3:3), its name was also associated with Baal, the great god of thunderstorms worshipped throughout the Near East. The biblical toponym "Hermon" alone testifies to its peculiar status. The current name of the Jabal al-Shaykh ("Shaykh's Mountain,"

"Old Man's Mountain") has sometimes tended to relegate it to oblivion, but it has not definitively superseded the Arabic *Ḥaramūn*, a copy of the Hebrew *Hermon*. The root *ḥrm*, to which it is attached, refers either to the concept of separation or to the notions of prohibition and consecration, as in the Arabic *ḥarām*. In any case the basic idea is that Mount Hermon was cut off from the world. The biblical tradition, both relayed and enriched by the Christians in late antiquity, is particularly interesting in this respect. On the one hand, Mount Hermon is a wilderness full of rustic fragrances and populated by wild beasts (Song of Songs 4:8). On the other, it is also a personified mountain exulting in the name of the Lord, who tames it by making it leap like a young buffalo (Psalms 89:13; cf. 29:6). This reputation of holiness and savagery persisted at least until the beginning of the fourth century ad. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (*Onom. s.v.* Ἀερμών), the local dwellers, who remained attached to their ancestral cults in his time, continued to consider the mountain a sanctuary or, more generally, an entity consecrated to the gods.

Other appellations refer to the physical features of the sacred mountain. The oldest one seemingly appeared during the Bronze Age, first in Akkadian (*Saria*), then in Hittite (*Šariyana*), Ugaritic (*šryn*), and Egyptian (*s3w-r-i-n3*). According to the Book of Deuteronomy (3:9), the Phoenicians said "Siryon." If it should indeed be compared to *šrwyn* / *šrwyn'*, the Syriac word for "cade" (*Juniperus oxycedrus*), this toponym may evoke the forests of the mountain, whose current state gives only a pale idea of what they were in antiquity, when junipers covered the whole area above 1,500 m. In the Paleo-Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic, Mount Hermon is, along with Mount Lebanon, the refuge of the Anunnaki gods and the place where the cedar forest grows under the protection of the demon Humbaba. Ugaritic poetry further emphasizes the quality of the forests of Lebanon and Hermon, whose cedars are used to build the palace of Baal. In the early Hellenistic period, Sirach (24:13) more correctly identified the massif with the land of juniper: in her own praise, Wisdom claims to have been raised "like a cedar in Lebanon and like a juniper in the mountains of Hermon."

The common association of Mount Hermon with juniper seems to have given rise to new tales under the Roman Empire. In the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos (F 2, quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.10.9), Brathy is a wild giant who gives his name to the mountain he rules, just like Kassios, Libanos, and Antilibanos. This character probably embodies Mount Hermon. His name comes from the Greek word for "savin juniper" (*Juniperus sabina*), all parts of which are poisonous. In the Aramaic translations of the Old Testament, Mount Hermon becomes even more clearly a Disgusting Fruit Mountain (*msry pyrwy*), perhaps because of a connection between the name "Siryon" and the Semitic root *sry*, "to corrupt oneself," "to stink."

The tradition popularized by the Book of Enoch from the Hellenistic period onward has contributed to further tarnishing the already equivocal reputation of Mount Hermon. In this pseudepigraphic text written in Aramaic in the second century bc, an episode from Genesis is developed to explain the origin of evil to the members of the religious community established in Qumrān. The corruption of mankind here stems from the civilizing action attributed to a group of angels who, under the name of Watchers, swear an oath and bind one another with a curse before uniting with the daughters of men and giving birth to evil giants (1 Enoch 6–8, ed. Milik 1976, and Langlois 2008, with Aramaic fragments; Black 1970, for later Greek versions; Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2004, for an English translation). The event is situated in both time and space, in the days of Jared, the father of Patriarch Enoch, and on the summit of Mount Hermon. In passing the mountain is identified with a cursed place according to a pun based on the etymology of the Hebrew word for "anathema" (*ḥērem*). The fact that one of the angels was named *Hermoni* (or *Hermani*), i.e., "the Hermonian," while the others have more ordinary names ending in *-el*, shows how crucial it was for the author(s) of the Book of Enoch to locate

the story in this very area. In the end, the Watchers ask Enoch to intercede on their behalf, but in vain, for the patriarch reads their request, falls asleep, and receives in a vision the verdict of the Lord in the region of Dan, between the southern foothills of Lebanon and Mount Hermon. There he finally brings to the fallen angels the rejection of their appeal.

The epigraphic documentation partly matches this tradition. It reveals not only that in Roman times some local gods were described as angels, as in Ḥalwa (*IGLS* XI, 1), but also that the top of the mountain had been set up as a place of worship for a supreme deity associated with the practice of an oath between initiates (*IGLS* XI, 40). It is to this site that Saint Jerome refers in the above-mentioned passage. The remains of the sanctuary have been found at the place now called Qaṣr ʿAntar. On a natural terrace, an oval enclosure made of large and carefully carved blocks still surrounds a rocky cone, not far from a natural cave. A small shrine open to the east was located south/southwest of the temenos. On 29 October 1869, the British explorers Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) and Charles Warren (1840–1927) discovered a gray limestone stele inscribed in Greek against the precinct wall. The stone was immediately taken to the British Museum, where it is still preserved today. In eight lines of rough letters, its text runs as follows: "According to an order given by the greatest and holy god, those who swear, from there." As Charles Clermont-Ganneau proposed in 1903, the anonymous god mentioned at the beginning of this document may well be the biblical Baal-Hermon. The end of the inscription is unfortunately too laconic for our taste. It seems to prohibit the worshippers who have not taken the ritual oath from trespassing the sacred area beyond the place where the stone was on display, which was quite usual in the case of mystery cults.

In the absence of other pieces of evidence it is difficult to decide whether any ritual was performed on the top of the mountain prior to the early Roman Empire. The connection between the Hellenistic Jewish tradition and the epigraphy is perhaps fortuitous. On the other hand, it is certainly not insignificant that Christians referred to the legends from the Book of Enoch when they spoke about Mount Hermon in late antiquity (e.g., Jer., *Treatise on Psalms* 132.3). The Jewish tradition provided them with arguments to condemn cults that were actually practiced here under Roman rule. At the very least, the discoveries of Qaṣr ʿAntar confirm the importance of the high place.

The Hermonian Sanctuaries

In addition to the main shrine on the summit of Mount Hermon, many places of worship have been identified on both sides of the mountain since the nineteenth century. The first travelers who visited them followed either the eastern road from Bāniyās (Paneas) to Damascus or the western road from Wādī al-Taym to Ḥaṣbayā, Rāshayā, and the Lebanese Bekaa Valley. Along the way they were able to describe the Hermonian temples. George Francis Taylor, a British archaeologist, historian, and numismatist, adopted the same approach to the sacred landscape in the 1960s, when he was a professor of English at the American University of Beirut. The information he and his predecessors gleaned remains precious today, especially with regard to religious buildings that disappeared long ago. For the same reason, the detailed architectural study that the members of the German archaeological mission to Baalbek (Heliopolis) carried out in Lebanon and Syria from 1901 to 1904 (and again in 1933) is irreplaceable, even if it covered only about a dozen sites on Mount Hermon (Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938). After these pioneering ventures, new archaeological missions were launched. No less than thirty cult sites (some of which include several separate sanctuaries) are known at present (Aliquot 2009, especially 333–367, for a comprehensive gazetteer with relevant bibliography). Most

of the places of worship were surrounded by tombs and often connected with ancient settlements. They are seemingly concentrated in the northern part of the mountain. Yet their geographical distribution is quite homogeneous and contrasts with the wider dispersion of sanctuaries on Mount Lebanon and northern Anti-Lebanon.

Krencker and Zschietzschmann (1938) were the first to emphasize the peculiarities of religious architecture on Mount Hermon by focusing on temples. Recent studies make it possible to complete their observations, to qualify some of their conclusions, and, above all, to put them into perspective with the trends at work in Roman Syria. The features of the Hermonian sanctuaries matched a new way of designing sacred spaces that was also adopted on Mount Lebanon, in the Bekaa Valley, as well as in Damascene and in the Aradian Peraea on the Bargylus (e.g., at Baitokaike). Religious construction tended to be planned. The altar was clearly distinguished from the temple building, standing in an axial position on a podium, and closed. These changes modified the outlook on the statues nestled in an innermost shrine (adyton), which only the priests were allowed to enter. Of course, all this took place in accordance with tradition, and there were exceptions. Sacred precincts or spaces without temples still existed (Kafr Ḥawwār). High-altitude rituals were always performed on summits (Qaṣr ʿAntar, Mdūkha). Quite often the construction of religious buildings on rugged ground did not allow the adoption of very regular plans.

With regard to the Hermonian temples themselves, the general features of these buildings may first be described negatively: usually their plan was not prostyle and their outside order was not the Corinthian order, whereas the type of the distyle *in antis* and the Ionic order were more common than elsewhere. On the other hand, a single opening instead of a triple door gave access to the cella, contrary to what can be found in several temples located in the Bekaa Valley and on Mount Lebanon, from Ṣfīra to Kadesh. This characteristic left space on the front wall for ornamentation, especially for niches or simple recesses. The inner system of stairs leading onto the adyton was quite remarkable in a few temples, whereas the structure of the adyton itself and the size of the crypts underneath show similarities with the architecture in the Syrian Ḥawrān (see chapter 36, this volume). It has also recently been pointed out that many Hermonian shrines were wholly or partly hollowed out of the rock. This aspect also corresponds to what can be found on Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon as well as in Caesarea Paneas, in front of the natural grotto and the rock scarp of the Panion. Moreover, all this echoes the assertions of Strabo (*Geog.* 16.2.18–20) about the lifestyle of the Arab and Ituraean mountain-dwellers who are said to have settled in the area since the second century bc. However, that is not to say that all shrines necessarily went back to the Hellenistic period. Although the foundation of the Hermonian sanctuaries is impossible to date precisely in the present state of our knowledge, all of the dated inscriptions they delivered tend to confirm that they were built and enhanced between the end of the first century ad and the beginning of the fourth century ad.

Too often this new set of sanctuaries from the Roman period was presented as a reserve of so-called Oriental paganism. Here we are faced with the presuppositions of a model that has had great success in both scholarly and popular literature on the societies of the ancient Near East: the model of the high places, which refers to the outdoor sanctuaries in Canaan before the Hebrew conquest. This model is based on the (real) presence of dozens of Roman sanctuaries in the Phoenician hinterland and on the (much more problematic) identification of the culture of their worshippers with those of the biblical Canaanites and the Phoenicians. It partly owes its popularity to the bad reputation of Mount Hermon and its inhabitants. Under Roman rule, Phoenicians such as Philo of Byblos reproduced the ancient stereotypes on the mountains of Lebanon while interpreting the regional mythology in Greek terms. For others, the area was a small Arabia, or a Near Eastern Arcadia, i.e., a harsh country of shepherds and giants (Aliquot 2009, 28–37, 64–69). Although they are sometimes based on the practice of

real worship, as evidenced by the cult of Pan at Caesarea Paneas, such depictions nonetheless reflect the prejudices of ancient ethnography on Arab, pastoral, and nomadic peoples. The exactions attributed to the Ituraeans certainly contributed to reviving them.

In no way should the Hermonian sanctuaries be viewed as museums of the timeless religiosity of the Semitic East. Their worshippers were as much concerned with showing their attachment to ancestral traditions as complying with Hellenism. This is why they translated vows by imitating behaviors that had become common for decades in the neighboring cities, particularly on the Phoenician coast and in Damascus. They transcribed votive formulas into Greek and gave Greek names to their gods. In that way, the adoption of Greek nomenclature came to overshadow nuances that could be made if their dedications had been written in a Semitic language. The gods were therefore characterized by their entrenchment in villages or in broader areas. This is an opportunity to mention the case of the many Hellenized lords who were worshipped under the names of Zeus or "the great god" or "the holy god." According to many scholars, from Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1846–1923) to Youssef Hajjar (1929–1993), they are likely to be undifferentiated apparitions of the unchanging biblical Baal-Hermon (Clermont-Ganneau 1903; Hajjar 1990, 2537–2541). Several denominations, however, also show the desire to individualize locally each manifestation of the great god: following the example of the "god who is in Dan" mentioned in the bilingual Greek and Aramaic dedication from Tel Dan in the early Hellenistic period (*IGLS* XI, A/12), the "holy god of Remala" (*IGLS* XI, 1) and the "god Zeus of the village of Ornea" (*IGLS* XI, 42) were separately worshipped in their own villages in Roman times. It must be concluded that devotion to local divinities interpreted as aspects of Zeus was as important, if not even more so, as the invocation of the supreme lord on the holy mountain.

Some less common cults further show that Mount Hermon was definitely not a region where religious traditions would have remained archaic because they were practiced by communities isolated from the outside world. Two other Hermonian deities were indeed worshipped from Phoenicia to the Decapolis and Arabia: Leucothea and Theandrios, whose Greek names probably substituted for those of native Syrian gods. The cult of the latter was celebrated in a temple dedicated in ad 198/199 at Rīma in the territory of Damascus (*IGLS* XI, 25, with Aliquot 2010). In the Greek terms that refer to the "male god" (θεὸς ἀνδρεῖος), we recognize the segmented name of Theandrios, a warrior deity worshipped in Damascus and above all renowned for his success among the Arabs. The reference to this god in Damascene reminds us once again of the early Arab presence in the region. It also echoes the mythological accounts that, since Hellenistic times, have staged the struggle between the Greek gods (Dionysus, Zeus, Hermes, sometimes assisted by an Arcadian hero named Damascus) and the Arab gods allied with giants, on the occasion of the foundation of Damascus as a city (e.g., Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Δαμασκός).

The cult of Leucothea is attested both in the territory of Damascus and Sidon on Mount Hermon. This minor Greek goddess, whose name evokes foam whiteness, was worshipped in Rakhla, where she had a temple (*IGLS* XI, 20–30). Leucothea was also hosted in another sanctuary at Segeira under Trajanus, according to a dedication from ʿAyn al-Būrj (fig. 46.2) which seemingly commemorated the founding of a festival in honor of a child who died accidentally and was deified as a result of this tragic episode (*IGLS* XI, 39, with Bowersock 2009, 611–613).

FIGURE 46.2. Greek dedication of Menneas son of Beeliabos to the goddess Leucothea of Segeira (*IGLS* XI, 39), Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, Brussels, inv. no. A 1622. © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma, IGLS Archive 2003.

In Ḥalwa, Leucothea's son Melicertes, known elsewhere (especially in Corinth) as Palaemon, makes an exceptional appearance in ad 156 as a god-angel in the ordinance of the great anonymous god of Remala (*IGLS* XI, 1 [fig. 46.3]).

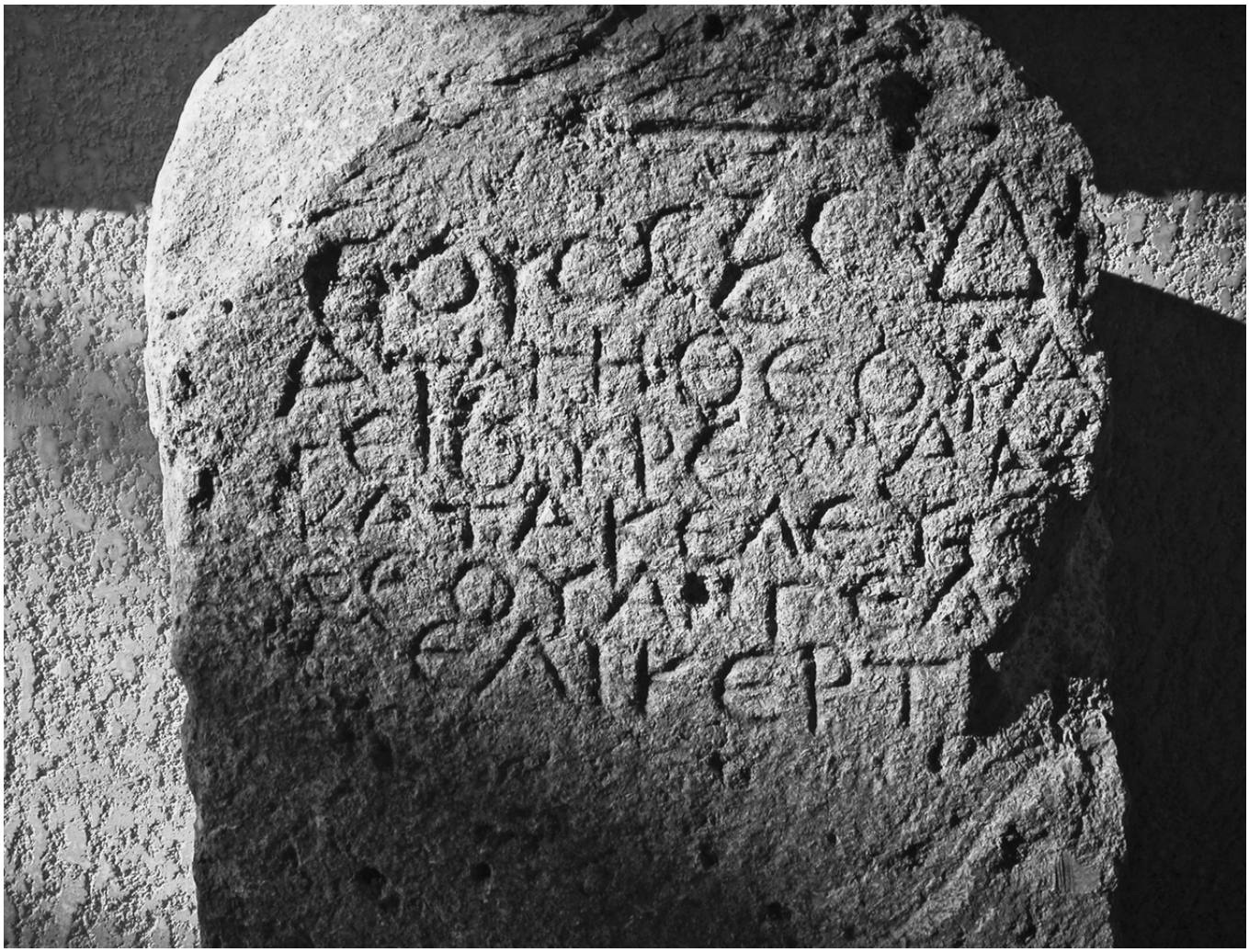

FIGURE 46.3. Ordinance of the holy god of Remala, displayed at Ḥalwa "according to an order given by the god-angel Melicertes" (*IGLS* XI, 1). © Julien Aliquot, CNRS/Hisoma, IGLS Archive 2004.

Leucothea and his son probably owed their remarkable success on Mount Hermon to Phoenician traditions (Aliquot 2009, 164–171). According to the best-known story that the Greeks used to tell about her, the goddess originally was Ino, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes, and second wife of King Athamas, with whom she had two sons, Melicertes and Learchus. Ino concocted a bogus oracle that demanded the death of Phrixus and Helle, but the children by Athamas's first marriage fled on a golden ram, this event announcing the quest of the Argonauts. Later, Athamas killed Learchus, and Ino ran from him carrying Melicertes. They jumped into the sea, where mother and son were transformed into deities under the names of Leucothea and Palaemon. This myth and the whole Boeotian cycle to which it belongs circulated intensely in Phoenicia since Hellenistic times, especially in the rival cities of Sidon and Tyre. For the Sidonians the integration of its protagonists into local traditions was in particular a means of affirming even further the Greekness of their city, which already presented itself as the metropolis of Thebes in the Hellenistic period. It was also a way to contest the right of the Tyrians to monopolize a prestigious kinship with Cadmus and his lineage. In this context it is highly significant that the worshippers who patronized the Hermonian sanctuaries on the borders of the territory of the Phoenician cities and Damascus appropriated the most sophisticated urban traditions and adapted them to their ancestral cults. This acculturation process was contemporary with the emergence of new village communities.

The Villagers and Their Temples

The human occupation of Mount Hermon has long been the subject of various and even contradictory assessments. As early as 1939, Henri Seyrig (1895–1973) had foreseen that the building of numerous Roman sanctuaries might well be the clue to an important social and economic change, on this massif as in the whole of Lebanon (Seyrig 1985, 139–144). However, his suggestion took a long time to get an echo. According to an influential theory on mountain settlement in the Near East throughout history, as it was developed by Xavier de Planhol (1926–2016) from the work of the French school of geography (Louis Dubertret, Richard Thoumin, Jacques Weulersse, Étienne de Vaumas), Mount Hermon would have remained an almost empty forest region until the Druze began to settle in the valley of Wādī al-Taym in the eleventh century AD (e.g., de Planhol 1968, 95–98; 1997, 59–83). But this theory is debatable, as it neglects the presence of the Ituraeans in the area during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. It is true that other scholars have not failed to remember the existence of this people (for example, Dominique Chevallier as early as 1971). Nevertheless, they did not envisage until recently the possibility that villages had developed at high altitudes: in their eyes, as for Xavier de Planhol, the Roman sanctuaries built on the slopes of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon were nothing more than places of pilgrimage isolated from any settlement.

The archaeological surveys that have been carried out in the region recently opened up new perspectives on this question while validating Seyrig's brilliant intuition. Their results are sometimes disappointing and on some points they should be considered with caution. Only traces of sporadic occupation of the mountain could be highlighted for the period that preceded the coming of Rome. Moreover, it seems too early to identify a specific Ituraean material culture (despite Dar 1993 or Hartal 2002 and 2005). One can only be skeptical about the attribution of the Golan Ware and its large pithoi (sometimes inscribed in Greek) to the Ituraeans. In fact, this ware was produced outside the main Ituraean settlement area and continued to be produced after the end of Ituraean domination. Nothing suggests that it ought to be described as Ituraean. On the other hand, the presence of villages on the slopes of the massif is undeniable as regards the Roman and early Byzantine periods. Leaving aside the exceptional sites of Caesarea Paneas and Tel Dan, which are both located on the fringes of the mountainous area, a first series of ancient settlements includes six Roman villages that are both identified in the field and known by their ancient Greek name: Ainkania (Jdaydat Yābūs/Qaṣr al-Ḥammāra), Barkousa (Burqush), Ina (Ḥīna), Kiboreia (Dayr al-ʿAshāyir), Ornea (ʿArna), and Rakhla. Remarkably, all of them are either associated with Roman temples within a single settlement or located in the immediate vicinity of one or more Roman sanctuaries. To these should be added Segeira, a cult site probably linked to a village near Qalʿat al-Jandal on the eastern side of Mount Hermon, the estate or village of Chresimianos, and the two anonymous sites of Har Senaim and Qalʿat Bustra, all close to Caesarea Paneas, as well as other settlements still difficult to date in the west of the massif. Mount Hermon thus was a country of villages associated with sanctuaries in Roman times.

The villagers' attachment to their temples is well illustrated by the discourse *For the Temples* that Libanius addressed to Theodosius I between AD 386 and 390, at a time when the immolation of victims was already forbidden, but when the last officially open traditional sanctuaries were exposed to assaults by monks, in an area no doubt larger than the Antiochene alone. The rhetor exposed the risks and consequences, particularly in the economic and fiscal field, of these attacks (Lib., *Or.* 30.9–11):

> Indeed, O Emperor, temples are the soul of the countryside, they are the first buildings built in the fields and they have come down to us through many generations. The farmers place their hopes in them for their men, their women, their children, their oxen, the land sown and planted. A country that has suffered this is a lost country and the courage of the farmers has disappeared along with their hopes. For they think that, once deprived of the gods who carried out their work to a good end, they will work in vain. Because the land is no longer cared for in the same way, the yield is less than before, and because of this, the farmer is poorer and the tax burden suffers. For, as he would like it with all his heart, impossibility stops him. Thus, the greatest interests are harmed by their insolence in the countryside. They say that they are waging war on the temples, but this war is a means to get to the riches contained in the temples, to plunder the wealth of the unfortunate, the products of their lands, and the livestock they feed. Then the assailants withdraw, taking the goods of those they have forced to surrender. But this is not enough for them: they also appropriate the land of so-and-so, claiming that it is sacred, and many have been deprived of their property under a false pretext.

Reading such a plea, one understands that on Mount Hermon as elsewhere in the Near East, the construction of temples may have appeared as a founding event of village identity. The epigraphy provides a great deal of information about the involvement of rural communities in this movement. Some documents, fewer in number and earlier in time, suggest that the development of the sanctuaries may have been the result first of private initiatives before taking on a collective character. In Rakhla, Leucothea was first referred to as the "goddess of Moithos" (*IGLS* XI, 20), undoubtedly after the name of a powerful individual who had founded the cult, before being the object of collective veneration in a public place under the name of "the goddess Leucothea" (*IGLS* XI, 21 and 35), "the goddess Leucothea of Rakhla" (*IGLS* XI, 23), or simply "the goddess" (*IGLS* XI, 22 and 27).

To highlight the ways in which the rural communities took care of their shrines, we can continue to rely on the emblematic case of Leucothea's sanctuary at Rakhla (*IGLS* XI, 20–30), whose history covers a long period, from the middle of the first century ad to the end of the third century ad, and whose epigraphic record, as abundant as it is coherent, brings together most of the data scattered elsewhere. Although the foundation of the cult most likely resulted from private initiative, the place was managed from ad 60 by administrators (διοικηταί), perhaps already at this date under the authority of an official exercising an undetermined power of command (ἀρχή). The village was then able to undertake work on such a scale that the consultation and the cooperation of its inhabitants would have been required. The construction of an Ionic temple on a podium may have begun as early as this moment, before repairs and new developments happened in the years ad 253 and 294. In the sanctuary a single priest (ἱερεύς) was in charge of the worship service. While managers or commissioners (ἐπιμεληταί) punctually assisted him in supervising the smooth running of the construction work, two temple-treasurers (ἱεροταμίαι) were in charge of the ordinary administration of Leucothea's goods.

The funds used to finance religious buildings came from the sacred treasury of the goddess. They were managed autonomously and independently of the village cash office, according to a practice that was common in the sanctuaries of the region, whose gods often appear as money handlers. Three inscriptions show the withdrawal of surplus cash from the sacred treasury for the development of the site (*IGLS* XI, 23, 24, 27). In at least one case, this treasury was partially funded by the interest on a capital or loan (in *IGLS* XI, 22, a building is said to have been erected in ad 252/253 "at the expense of the goddess taken from the interest"). The use of the word "income," "interest" (τόκος), leaves open the question of the primary origin, movable or immovable, of sacred wealth. It can be assumed that the goddess benefited from the levy in money or in kind on the work of peasants, from the income from leases, or from the return on investments or loans granted to the village or to the individuals who managed the sanctuary. In any case the hypothesis of a loan following a pious foundation is the one that best corresponds to the terms used (ἀπὸ τόκου). One can deduce from all this the existence of

an economic circuit, rather banal in principle, where an offering, whatever it was, was first deposited in the treasury of Leucothea, then used and possibly transformed into a liquidity fund before finally returning to its original destination. For the donors, the consecration of money to the god guaranteed the proper use of the income by preventing the misappropriation of funds. In the context of a monetarized rural economy, the sanctuary of Leucothea appears as a credit center whose capital bore fruit before being reinvested in religious construction.

The names of all the officials known at Rakhla provide a representative sample of the regional onomastic variety, where Semitic names transcribed into Greek outnumber Greek and Latin anthroponyms. Their study, cross-referenced with prosopographical data, suggests that the priests, treasurers, and leaders were recruited in a privileged manner within the richest and most powerful families of the village. These groups were not radically opposed to the community, as kinship relationships were subsumed under the manifestations of collective life. However, the cliques of notables who held the upper hand in the Hermonian villages still monopolized priesthoods and the other duties related to the shrines.

To sum up, the making of an impressive network of villages and sanctuaries on Mount Hermon accompanied the advent of a new social order under Roman rule. It was due neither to Rome nor to cities (apart from Caesarea Paneas), but to villagers. The sanctuaries were built by notables who came after the client kings. This is why their aspect reflected the search for a compromise between local traditions and Roman models. The notables funded the religious buildings, assumed the priesthoods, controlled the sacred funds, and dedicated their own resources to the local gods. The choice they made to adapt Hellenism and Roman architecture to their own traditions thus appears as a manifestation of their influence on society and as a means to perpetuate their domination.

Epilogue: Toward Late Antiquity

One may wonder when all this ended. Officially Theodosius I issued an edict to prohibit sacrifices and to decree the closure of temples throughout the empire in AD 391/392. These drastic measures came after more than a century of struggle between pagans and Christians. On Mount Hermon as elsewhere in the Near East, no pagan sanctuary was founded in the fourth century AD. As in all of Lebanon, however, the region has yielded rare manifestations of the traditional cults in the first half of the fourth century AD. A dedication from ʿArna deals with the completion of the decoration of the temple of Zeus and the management of the sacred estates of the village of Ornea in AD 330, under Constantine (*IGLS* XI, 42). During the reign of the same emperor, Caesarea Paneas was already the seat of a suffragan bishop of the metropolitan of Tyre as well as a holy place where Christians came to venerate the statue that represented the miracle of the woman whom Jesus healed from an issue of blood (Maraval 1985, 334–335; Weber 1996). It seems that the sanctuaries of the area were gradually abandoned as Christianization progressed, but the mountain was certainly not affected by this change at the same rate as the Phoenician cities or other regions. One understands the emphasis of Eusebius of Caesarea and Saint Jerome on the vitality of the traditional cults on the sacred mountain. We have to wait until the end of the fifth century and the sixth century AD to see clear signs of the adhesion to the Christian faith, especially in the newly founded cities of Zenonopolis (Rakhla) and Justinianopolis (Barkousa).

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CHAPTER 47

IUDAEA/PALAESTINA

AVNER ECKER

Palaestina is the ancient Greek name (Hdt. 2.104) given to the region on the eastern littoral of the Mediterranean, south of the Lebanon Mountains all the way to the Sinai Peninsula. It can best be explained as originating from the biblical Philistines that inhabited the coast. This region, which slightly exceeds 20,000 km^2, is a mostly fertile and temperate strip of land locked between the Mediterranean and the deserts of the Middle East. Consequently, it is a bottleneck land passage between Africa and the Eurasian block (Isaac 2020).

The Ptolemies considered the region the southern part of Syria kai Phoinicē, whereas the Seleucid official sources employ the obscure term Koilē Syria, "hollow Syria." The change in name may have stemmed from a Seleucid drive to differ from the official Ptolemaic one. The name possibly reflects the Seleucid notion of the area as a westernmost appendage to the main body of Syria beyond the "cavity" of the Jordan Valley Rift or the Bekaa Valley, though the region had many other geographic features (Sartre 2018).

Israel and The Land of Israel (Eretz Israel) harks back to the biblical Davidic kingdom. The name was used with increasing frequency among Jews since the Hasmonean dynasty, where it appears mostly as a name for the Jewish nation rather than for a place (e.g., 1 Maccabees 1:64). It also appears as a name for the nation on coins of the Great Revolt (ad 66–70) and the name of the short-lived Bar Kokhbah rebel state (ad 132–136). From the late second century onward, in Rabbinic writings, the Land of Israel becomes a standard appellation for Iudaea/Palaestina (Ben-Eliyahu 2019, 22–30).

Iudaea is the name given to the central mountain region around Jerusalem where the biblical tribe of Judah once sat. The name was then given to the Iron Age kingdom of Judah, and subsequently became the name of the small Persian-period satrapy of Yahud centered around Jerusalem. It was first treated as a distinct administrative unit in the Roman Empire in 63 bc, when Pompey divided it between the governors of the province of Syria and local Hasmonean ethnarchs, who were then succeeded by Herod (37 bc to 4 bc) followed by the short rule of his son Archelaus (4 bc–ad 6; Sharon 2017). Epigraphic finds attest that Hasmonaeans and then Herod used the name Iudaea for their kingdoms that at their peak covered the entirety of Palaestina (Cotton and Geiger 1989, nos. 804–816; Ecker 2013, 67–71; Haensch 2014, 104; *AE* 1992, 1697, 1699).

On the death of Herod, the cities of Gaza, Hippos, and Gadara, which suffered under Jewish rule, requested and received imperial permission to be separated from the Herodian kingdom and be subject to the governors of Syria (Jos., *BI* 2.84–100; *Ant. Iud*. 17.304–323; Nicolaus of Damascus in *FGrH* II, A90, F136; Millar 1993, 43; Schwartz 2002, 69–71). In ad 6, Augustus transferred most of the region from the control of the Herodians to the control of equestrian prefects who were subject to the governors of Syria. As soon as Vespasian arrived at the head of an army to quell the Jewish Revolt in ad 67, Iudaea became the name of a small province, that after ad 70 was garrisoned by a single legion (Legio X Fretensis) and governed by a *legatus augusti pro praetore* who doubled as the commander of this legion as well. Perhaps at this time the above-mentioned cities that were part of the province of Syria came under this newly created province. Trajan added a legion to the province (first the Legio II Traiana then the

Legio VI Ferrata) and elevated its governors to consulars (for the legionary camps in Legio, near Megiddo, and in Jerusalem see: Tepper 2021; Weksler Bdolach 2019). Hadrian changed the name of the province to Syria Palaestina after the Bar Kokhba Revolt, as far as we know, without affecting its borders (see Czajkowski, chapter 18, this volume). The province maintained the same borders until Diocletian's reforms, and by the fifth century it was divided into three smaller provinces (Di Segni 2018).

Geography and Climate

Palaestina is typically divided into five regions: the Coastal Plain, the Galilee, the Central Highlands, the Jordan Valley Rift, and the Negev. The coastal plain is humid and fertile, marked by low coastal sandstone ridges and sand beaches backed by dunes. The Galilee is divided into two sections, the lower and upper Galilee. The lower is bound on the south by the Jezreel Valley and is marked by east–west hill ridges not exceeding 800 m, whereas the northern Galilee is more mountainous with peaks upward of 1,000 m and climbs as it proceeds to the north toward the Lebanon Mountains. The Central Highlands, south of the Jezreel Valley all the way south of Jerusalem to the Hebron Mountain and hills, is a region of north–south low ridges (except for the Hebron Mountain that exceeds 1,000 m) that runs between the coastal plain and the Jordan Valley Rift. The latter is the northern part of a geological rift between Africa and Asia that begins in Mozambique and ends in Lebanon. Within the bounds of ancient Palaestina, this area is marked by the Judaean Desert, a rain shadow desert east of Jerusalem, bound on the east by the Dead Sea which is fed by the Jordan River coming in from the north emanating from the Sea of Galilee, which in turn is fed by the melting snow of Mount Hermon. The southern part of the land, south of the central highland, is the Negev Desert that is part of the North African and Arabian desert strip (Tsafrir et al. 1994, 9–14; Rainey and Notley 2006, 37–42).

Center or Periphery?

Perhaps the most famous of all "Bible Atlases" (as historical atlases dealing with the southern Levant and the ancient Near East are sometimes called) was authored by Anson Rainey and Steven Notley (2006) and called "The Sacred Bridge"—emphasizing the central location of Palaestina at the passage between the Eurasian block and Africa. There is no doubt that this centrality has influenced much of its tumultuous history.

It was, however, no more sacred than any other place. Some Jews may have regarded it as sacred, and at that, probably no earlier than the Second Temple period (Ben-Eliyahu 2019). Palaestina first achieved its empire-wide status of a *terra sancta* only with the advent of Christianity, and only during late antiquity did it become a world-renowned destination (Sivan 2008, 187–229). Constantine's churches (Weksler Bdolah 2019, 131–146) mark the first instance of imperial initiative in this region that did not stem from a reaction to revolt or happened as a by-product of an imperial tour that included a passage from Syria to Egypt. In fact, apart from Hadrian, no Roman emperor set Palaestina as a destination on any of his tours. Emperors such as Marcus Aurelius, and even Septimius Severus passed through the land (Eck 2014).

Palaestina may be described not only as a passage country, but also as a "contested periphery." Mitchell Allen (1997), coined the term for describing the late Iron Age Philistine coast and meant it as a description for a semi-peripheral zone caught between two core areas

of world powers—in his case, the cities of the Philistine coast and the Neo-Assyrian versus the Egyptian Empires (see also Cline 2000). This is true for Palaestina also during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In the global aspect, the land lay at the epicenter between large powers. In the Hellenistic period Ptolemaic and Seleucid forces fought over the land during five Syrian Wars, and even later, seesawing between Ptolemaic and Seleucid support is one of the hallmarks of Hasmonaean history. Later, during the first century bc, Parthian interests were supported by local rulers against the interests of Rome and its local supporters, who eventually took charge.

It is from the rise of Augustus and the ensuing *pax romana*, after Rome asserted its dominance over the eastern Mediterranean, that the tug of power between empires did not directly affect the land—even though the Parthian threat always remained and was central to the ongoing policies of Roman emperors regarding the Near East as a whole. Until the third century there was no rival empire that had its sights specifically on provincia Iudaea/Palaestina (Millar 1993, 127ff.). It was during these centuries, the first and the second ad, that internal conflicts among the peoples of the land were at their height, doubtlessly contributing to the instigation of successive revolts (Goodman 1987; Horbury 2014). Following the revolts, and during the successive periods of Roman rule in the Near East until the time of Constantine, Palaestina joined the world of cities sandwiched between the poles of Antioch and Alexandria (see Rubina, chapter 1, in this volume).

The Population

Iudaea/Palaestina is distinguished by having the densest concentration of monotheists in the ancient world—Jews and Samaritans. It thus lends itself to being studied separately from other regions of the Roman Near East.

The rise of the Hasmonean dynasty in the mid-second century bc set the stage for Jewish dominance in Palaestina. John Hyrcanus and then Alexander Jannaeus brought about Jewish hegemony over all people in the region. When Pompey created Provincia Syria in 63 bc he handled his wars and his politics versus Hasmonean rulers. Consequently, he ripped the non-Jewish cities away from the Hasmoneans, and created what Schürer (1973–1987, 2:184) called the "Jewish Region" in the Galilee, Samaria, and Judea—the inland sections of Palaestina surrounded by non-Jewish cities.

Jews regained their hegemony under Augustus, with the powers invested in King Herod. This cultural and political prominence continued in the land during the first century ad, with Jerusalem being the largest and most lavish city in the region, sporting a temple of unparalleled dimensions and a bustling religious and intellectual life (the Dead Sea Scrolls being the prime example) connecting Jews from all over the diaspora. The destruction of the Jewish Temple in ad 70, and then the mortal blows of the Bar Kokhba Revolt dismantled Jewish hegemony in Palaestina. From the second century onward the main center of Judaism transferred to the Galilee, where intellectual activity continued and the writings of rabbinic Judaism were composed between the third and eighth centuries ad (Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn, and Millar 2012). In the Galilee one can find the densest concentration of synagogues in the ancient world. Jewish communities continued as parts of all major *poleis* in the region. Remains of synagogues were discovered in Gaza, Ascalon, Caesarea, Scythopolis, Gadara, and Gerasa (see map in Tsafrir et al. 1994; Levine 2000; Hachlili 2013; Leibner 2018; Magness et al. 2018). A rural Jewish community persisted also in the southern Hebron hills (Werlin 2015).

However, the abundance of ancient Jewish sources from the region and the propensity of modern scholarship to study Palaestina in Jewish contexts often obscures the origins and histories of diverse populations that resided in the major cities along the coast, such as Gaza, Ascalon, Caesarea, and the cities of the Decapolis (Millar 2006). The identity and religion of these peoples, dubbed by Josephus Syrians and Hellenes (Jos. *BI* 2.266–267) is often difficult to trace.

Inscriptions, mosaics, coins, tombs, buildings, roads, and a substantial corpus of local Greek writers are exceptional representations of their identities, religions, and overall cultures (Belaychе 2001; Raja 2012; Andrade 2013; Geiger 2014).

Southward of the Syrian basalt deserts, along the current territory of Jordan/Hashemite Kingdom and into the Negev Desert one could find the Nabateans, an ethnos of nomads-turned-sedentary who held their kingdom from the second century bc until ad 106 when it was annexed by Rome and became Provincia Arabia. Their language, law, and religion (with their main god being Dushara) is preserved in their magnificent architecture, their royal inscriptions, coins, graffiti, and papyri (see Schmid and Fiema; Tholbecq, chapter 48, this volume). The Nabatean presence in the Negev is concentrated along a route connecting Gaza and Petra (Erickson-Gini and Israel 2013).

Just north of the Negev, in the Judaean Lowlands, one entered Idumaea, the region of the Idumaeans, who are to be differentiated from the earlier, "biblical," Edomites (Bartlett 1999). This people presumably arrived in the region west of Iudaea during the sixth century bc, filling the vacuum that followed the Babylonian conquest. This theory remains unproven by the archaeological record. The earliest finds that can be connected with the Idumaeans are from the latter half of the fourth century bc. So far, there is no possibility of tying their Judaean Lowlands Hellenistic/Early Roman culture with the Edomite Iron Age (seventh century bc) culture found in the eastern edges of the Negev Desert. John Hyrcanus conquered their major city Maresha and forcefully converted the Idumaeans to Judaism in the last decade of the second century bc (these were the forefathers of King Herod—Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 13.257). Maresha was abandoned (perhaps rebuilt on an adjacent hill). The site has been extensively excavated, and remnants of Idumaean culture were discovered there in hundreds of subterranean complexes that crisscrossed the ancient city (Stern 2018). The last indication of the Idumaeans is their record of participation in the revolt of ad 66–70. It seems that this people disappeared after a long period of assimilation to Judaism. Their culture is preserved by thousands of Aramaic ostraca inscribed with their own type of script between the fifth and second centuries bc (Yardeni 2016). The ostraca were discovered in Maresha and its immediate environs. Finds from Maresha exhibit a dichotomous mixture of local practices and imported Greek-style practices (see similar phenomena among Ituraeans in Aliquot, chapter 46, this volume). This is of course most prevalent in cult practices which seem to include ritual bathing installations, open-air cult places, schematic or un-iconic representation of gods (Levin 2020), and Aramaic-language divination texts (Eshel and Stern 2017) discovered alongside Greek-inscribed astragali (Perry-Gal, Erlich, and Stern 2022; *CIIP* IV, 3661–3670). On the other hand, some altars are inscribed and dedicated to Olympian gods such as Demeter and Apollo (*CIIP* IV.2, 3502, 3507), and terracotta ornamented with scenes from classical mythology (e.g., a terracotta plaque displaying Hades and Persephone) and terracotta figurines of Hercules, Aphrodite, and Athena (Erlich 2008).

Along the coast one finds a series of ancient cities-turned-*poleis* in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. These communities express deep Phoenician and Egyptian influences in their local pantheons and seem to have had firm local identities. Gazans worshipped the deity Marnas, Ascelonites worshipped a local version of Atargatis or Astarte given the *interpretatio graeca* of Aphrodite Urania (Herodotus 1.105), the citizens of the colony of Caesarea Maritima, formerly

known as Straton's Tower had a strong affinity to Isis (Patrich 2011, 83–90). The official public language in the inscriptions from these cities was Greek, and in the *coloniae* of Aelia Capitolina and Caesarea it was for the most part Latin. Onomastics, however, sometimes reveal a people's Semitic origins. It seems that the cities held the idea of belonging to the greater region of Palaestina as part of their identity—for instance, the goddess of Ascalon is described in an inscription from Delos as *Astarte Palaestina* (Ἀστάρτηι Παλαιστινῆι–IDelos 2305).

Inland, east of the Jordan, in the southern parts of the Golan Heights and in the northern tip of the Jordan Valley Rift one finds the cities of the Decapolis: a culturally and possibly politically bound league of cities, perhaps created in the first century bc under Pompey (see Bobou and Raja, chapter 43, this volume). These cities probably included Philadelphia, Pella, Gerasa, Abila, Dion, Gadara, Canatha, Damascus, Hippos, and Scythopolis. Here, too, is a Syrian population that embraced Hellenism. For example, the city of Beit-Shean that turned during the third century bc into Nysa-Scythopolis announced in a second-century inscription that it is of "A *polis* among the Greek *poleis* of Koele-Syria" (κατὰ Κοίλην Συρίαν Ἑλλη|νίδων πόλεων ἡ πόλις—*SEG* XL, 1509; *CIIP* V, 7617).

A specific manifestation of local culture is evident in the two hundred funerary busts retrieved from the necropoleis of Scythopolis and Samaria-Sebaste dating to the second and third centuries ad. These busts present men and women sculpted in local limestone who wear Roman-style robes and dresses and sport hair and beard styles that imitate the current imperial fashion; whereas their facial features are schematically carved, their wide eyes are given a frozen frontal gaze, and their small mouths are slightly lifted in a smile (fig. 47.1).

FIGURE 47.1. Funerary busts from the necropolis of Scythopolis (ca. third century **AD**). Courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Thirteen busts from Scythopolis bear inscriptions, all in Greek; on some the names are Semitic and others Greek in origin ((Skupinska-Løvset 1983; 1996; *CIIP* V, 6617, 7568, 7695–7706) compare to the funerary busts from Palmyra—Bobou and Raja, chapter 7, this volume).

Along the central mountain ridge, south of the Jezreel Valley and north of the Judaean Mountains, one finds the region of Samaria. The region kept its name as a small province under the Achaemenids. Samaria was the traditional land of the homonymous Samaritans, who held their central temple at the top of Mount Gerizim above Shechem/Nablus. The Samaritans formed a substantial monotheistic population that, according to Jewish sources, existed in rivalry and competition with their Jewish neighbors (for a recent review of Samaritan studies, see Pummer 2021).

Samaria was also the name of the major city of the region, and around 332 bc its populace apparently murdered Andromachos, Alexander's governor in Syria, burning him alive (Curt. 4.8.9). Alexander summarily punished the Samaritans of the city and region, and according to even later sources (esp. Jer., *Chron*. 123 ed. Helm) settled Macedonians there. If this settlement is true, then it is Alexander's first colony in his campaign (Cohen 2006, 274–277). The bones of two hundred men, women, and children together with Aramaic papyri, some preserved with bullae, discovered in a cave in Wadi Daliyeh on the slopes running into the Jordan Valley, probably belong to refugees who escaped from Samaria during this event (Dušek 2020). The fate of the Macedonian colony in Samaria is not clear; the city was overrun by

Hasmonean rulers, freed from Jewish control by Pompey, and most important, reestablished in 25 bc as Sebaste by Herod who settled his own veterans there and built at its top a large temple to Augustus (Jos., *Ant. Iud*. 15.292, 299; Netzer 2008; Kushnir-Stein 2005). During the Roman period it became a central cult place of Kore (Magness 2001). Throughout the first and second centuries soldiers called "Sebastenes" were recruited to the Herodian armies and then to Roman *auxilia* (Shatzman 1991; Dąbrowa 2015; Zeichmann 2018).

Ten kilometers north of Samaria lay Shechem and above it a temple to Yahweh was constructed on Mount Gerizim during the fifth century bc. Excavations on Mount Gerizim uncovered the surrounding buildings of the temenos and around it about four hundred Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions from the third and second centuries bc that commemorate *ex voto* dedications to the temple. John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple and surrounding city in 111–110 bc (Magen, Misgav, and Tsfania 2004; Magen 2008; Magen, Bijovsky, and Tzionit 2021).

Sources are not clear whether the Samaritans continued some form of worship on Mount Gerizim or just aspired to do so. Information about their community during the first centuries before and during the Common Era is scant. In the 30s, Pontius Pilate massacred a large group of Samaritans who wanted to climb the mountain. A "council of the Samaritans," Σαμαρέων ἡ βουλή (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 18.88), launched a complaint to the governor of Syria, Vitellius, against him. It is unclear if this council was a standing assembly of the Samaritan leadership, some other ad hoc assembly, or the city council of Samaria-Sebaste (in which case the city is named after its *chora*). In ad 67, while Vespasian was besieging Iotapata in the Galilee, a large force of Samaritans tried once more to conquer the summit of Mount Gerizim (it's not clear from whom) —they were pushed back by the soldiers of the Legio V Macedonica (Jos., *BI* 3.307–315).

After the Great Revolt Vespasian established the *polis* of Flavia-Neapolis on the hill and in the valley adjacent to the north of Mount Gerizim, overlooking the site of ancient Shechem. A large temple to Zeus was built there. Interestingly, an early third-century city-coin depicting the skyline of Neapolis shows not only the temple to Zeus but also a smoking altar where the temple of Mount Gerizim once stood (Magen 2009) (fig. 47.2).

FIGURE 47.2. City coin of Neapolis from the reign of Philip I (**AD** 247–249) displaying on its reverse the temple of Zeus above the city and an altar on the adjacent mountain top to the right. Courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Greek donation inscriptions reappear on Mount Gerizim during the late third and fourth centuries ad, recording Jewish/Samaritan names. All through the Roman period and late antiquity, the Samaritan population is also recorded in literary sources and with Greek and Hebrew inscriptions (in a special Samaritan script that is a form of Paleo-Hebrew) among the city populations of Palaestina—especially in Ascalon, Caesarea, and Scythopolis. During this period the Samaritans had built their own synagogues, both in these cities and in the region of Samaria.

In the fifth century, following a series of Samaritan revolts, the emperor Zenon built a large octagonal church on the remains of the Samaritan temple; this church was expanded and fortified by Justinian in the sixth century.

People and Material Culture

Apart from the funerary busts discussed earlier in the chapter, some small finds from Hellenistic and Roman Palaestina often exhibit distinct regionality that sometimes may also be connected to a degree with the local populace. This, of course, does not mean that direct links may be made between regional workshops and ethnic and religious groups (see Berlin 2014).

Perhaps the best-known case is that of the chalk stone vessels. Kraters, cups, boxes, and ossuaries were produced by lathe and carving in Jerusalem and its vicinity from the first century bc until the second century ad (fig. 47.3).

FIGURE 47.3. An assemblage of first-century **AD** serving vessels from upper-class households in Jerusalem. Including Eastern Terra Sigillata A, a Pseudo-Nabatean bowl, and chalk stone vessels. Courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

It is generally accepted that they were preferred by Jews because of Jewish purity laws (Adler 2022). Their production and use continued in the Galilee up until the fourth century ad (Adler and Mizzi 2022; Sherman et al. 2020). These types of vessels, especially from the second century ad onward, were also found in explicitly non-Jewish contexts, including among the finds from the legionary camp of the Legio VI Ferrata (Tepper et al. 2016, 112).

Another type of regional product that may be an ethnic indicator is a group of about 170 sarcophagi discovered in Samaria-Sebaste, Neapolis, and throughout Samaria and bordering regions. The sarcophagi are generally narrow, some "childlike" small, made of soft limestone and in most cases decorated with geometric designs and/or floral motifs. The sarcophagi are reminiscent of Jewish ossuaries. They generally date between the second and third centuries ad. Rachel Barkay (1987/1988) suggested considering them Samaritan sarcophagi. They may, however, be a product of a local workshop not intended for exclusive use by Samaritans.

The case of the wheel-made knife-pared ("Herodian") oil lamp is instructive. A type of lamp that was produced in Jerusalem or its close vicinity and was the most popular oil lamp in the land. In the Jewish cities of Iotapata and Gamala (both destroyed during the Great Revolt and never rebuilt), this type represented close to 95 percent of the oil lamp assemblages. It is obvious that Jews preferred to use these Jerusalem-made oil lamps, even though they had

access to locally made lamps. These lamps were also popular among non-Jewish city dwellers, as they represent a high percentage of the oil lamp finds in the cities of Dor and Scythopolis (Adan-Bayewitz et al. 2008).

A Jewish village in the Galilee called Kephar Hannania had a famous workshop (first century bc to sixth century ad) for bowls, casseroles, and cooking pots that were even mentioned in Rabbinic literature. These vessels dot every site between the Golan Heights and the Plain of Acre. They are also found, to a lesser extent, in Caesarea on the shore and in Scythopolis (Adan-Bayewitz 1993; see also Weiss 2007). These vessels were expertly made and appreciated by all the peoples of Palaestina. In the military camp of the sixth legion the Kephar Hananiah cooking pots doubled as urns (Tepper and Adams 2016, 114).

At Beit-Natiff, on the northern edges of the Judaean lowlands, a village of potters active between the second and sixth centuries ad created clay figurines and oil lamps bearing figurative art, crosses, and menorahs (figs. 47.4, 47.5).

38-286
cm 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

FIGURE 47.4. Clay figurine, a goddess in a temple, from the workshop at Beit Natiff. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (photo by Clara Amit, IAA no. 1938-226).

FIGURE 47.5. An oil lamp from the workshop at Beit Natiff bearing a Menorah decoration. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (photo by Yael Yulovich, IAA no. 1978-1296).

We do not know what the ethnic or religious background of the people of Beit Natiff was (possibly some were Roman army veterans—Zissu and Klein 2011). Regardless of what they were: Jews, Christians, or pagans—they recognized the diverse religious landscape of late antique Palaestina and decided to capitalize on it. Beit Natiff products are very special, because they represent the local awareness of difference (Lichtenberger 2016; 2017).

Languages

Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek were the languages of the different peoples of Hellenistic and Roman Palaestina. Latin was introduced by Rome and its use remained confined to the military, administration, and general displays of power (Eck 2009). Documentary and literary sources supply fertile grounds for the study of these coexisting and competing languages (Cotton et al. 2009).

The role of Aramaic and Hebrew within Jewish society is often studied. Generally, Aramaic was considered the language for daily life whereas Hebrew was reserved for intellectual and religious activity. Hebrew and Paleo-Hebrew script maintained a high level of symbolism, as seen in use of this script for the name of Yahweh in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, on coins of Hasmonaean rulers and of the First and Second Jewish Revolts, and in the Bar Kokhbah Letters (Schwartz 1995; Spolsky 2014). Boundaries between Hebrew and Aramaic, however, are constantly blurred in the epigraphic record. The same inscription may contain phrases in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic. The same person in two separate inscriptions may employ Aramaic in one and Hebrew in the other (Price 2020).

Whereas Hebrew, Aramaic, and its cognates follow a somewhat "natural" development in the region as they divided into local dialects and merged one into the other, Greek was a foreign introduction into the entire East, and despite centuries of research, its popularity is still something of a wonder. Officially, in the sense dictated by Droysen, Greek came on stage in the East with the arrival of Alexander and the advent of Hellenism. Indeed, as soon as the third century bc the city of Gadara was home to Menippus (s.v. in Geiger 2014), credited with the invention of satire and influential for generations to come—especially as transmitted through the writings of Lucian. The Alexandrian intellectual endeavor had brought about the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek, apparently during the first half of the third century bc, and if the letter of Aristeas is to be believed, it was done with the assistance of translators from Palaestina.

Greek in the epigraphic record of third-century bc Palaestina is rare and more often than not connected to Royal Ptolemaic inscriptions (e.g., a dedication to Ptolemy IV in Jaffa *CIIP* III, 2172; a dedication to his wife in Maresha, *CIIP* IV, 3514). In these early stages Greek was probably used among the few colonists who settled in the region, such as the family of a Cretan mercenary from Gaza (*CIIP* III, 2482), and in the upper echelons of administration, as in a letter from Tobias a local leader to Apollonius (P. Zen. 1. 59075). The earliest Greek ostracon is a bilingual Greek/Aramaic from the Khirbet el-Kom in the vicinity of Maresha dated to 277 bc (Geraty 1975). Daily use of Greek in local administration and commerce seems to have begun during the second century bc under Seleucid rule when the office of *agoranomos* is introduced to the region and with it Greek-inscribed lead weights, Greek ostraca recording commodities, local amphora stamps, and most of the local autonomous or semi-autonomous mints (see chapters in Kloner et al. 2010; Kloner 2011; Finkielsztejn 2012; Ecker 2022). At this time Seleucid royal dossiers appear in the centers of towns and cities; these inscriptions perhaps play a central role in introducing Greek as the language of civic public life (*CIIP* III, 2267; *CIIP* IV, 3511, 3512; *CIIP* V, 7561). From the second century bc onward the use of Greek, at least as an epigraphic language, steadily increased, though literary production in Hebrew and daily and legal use of Aramaic never ceased throughout antiquity.

The plurality of languages in the Roman Near East is often emphasized in modern research. This gave birth to the multilingual *Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* (*CIIP*) that has already published 7,800 inscriptions in more than ten languages. The archives of the *CIIP* contain 16,000 inscriptions, all dating between the advent of Alexander and the rise of Islam. Of these inscriptions, 9,000 are in Greek, 5,000 in "Jewish Script" (meaning Hebrew and/or Aramaic), and almost 1,000 in Latin; the remaining 1,000 inscriptions are divided between Palmyrene, Nabatean, Safaitic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and a few other languages with about one hundred of each. Not surprisingly, languages with low appearance rates are those that are not indigenous to Palaestina and come from neighboring regions. Perhaps more surprising is that despite the local cultural variety, Aramaic and Greek were common to all people of Palaestina. Greek, however, was the only public epigraphic language for the local non-Jewish populations of Roman Palaestina.

Conclusion

Iudaea, Palaestina, Eretz Israel is justifiably studied primarily through the lens of Jewish history. As historians, we subject ourselves to our sources, and in this case the sources are primarily Jewish. Archaeology and epigraphy of Palaestina supply us with new sources that allow us to uncover the histories of other groups who shared this land as well. Ancient Jewish historians relate tales of conflict between Jews and their neighbors—stories of rivalry and deadly opposition. One wonders whether other peoples of Palaestina also warred among themselves. If Jewish ancient history is not unique, as one should in fact assume, then it is quite possible that not all cities of Hellenistic and Roman Palaestina always lived in harmony. More important, though, the finds emphasize cooperation, which is often lacking in the dramatic descriptions centered on war and struggle. The soldiers of the sixth legion were using cooking pots manufactured by Jews: there is no reason to assume that they stole these pots, they probably bought them. Along the way they also bought Jewish-style chalk stone vessels. The people of Beit Natiff traded freely with people of all faiths. And all these interactions were done in one of two common tongues, Aramaic or Greek.

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CHAPTER 48

PETRA DURING THE NABATAEAN, ROMAN, AND BYZANTINE PERIODS

LAURENT THOLBECQ

Introduction

To what extent does Petra offer an original case study of a classical-period Near Eastern city? To answer this question, one needs to identify the likely origins and the unique dynamics of this particular city during the twelve centuries of its existence (fourth century BC–eighth century AD), significantly its varied political and socio-economic manifestations from the early Hellenistic period till the rise of Islam. In a long-term perspective, and because of its geographical remoteness, Petra had experienced a progressive isolation from major political centers. Three critical moments of the city's evolution most profoundly affect its history: its status as a Hellenistic royal capital, from at least the third century BC till AD 106; as a *ciuitas*/*polis* model city defining its new identity within the network of concurrent *poleis* after the Roman annexation of the Nabataean kingdom; and as a partially disrupted city hit by several major earthquakes beginning in the mid-fourth and early fifth century AD, affected by transitions in late Roman and Byzantine political, economic, and religious frameworks. These evolutions follow a model of punctuated equilibrium, but throughout there emerge some immutable qualities. The environment, for instance, remains rather unchanged from arid although not hostile, possibly deteriorating slightly from the Roman periods onward. Similarly, segmentary lineages retain importance for the city's overall social structure throughout these periods, despite successive political, economic, and religious systems presenting specific paths of social mobility. In contrast, changes in public wealth and private incomes driven by local economic transitions fluctuate more readily due to large-scale and local disruptions that result from environmental and demographic evolutions, political decisions (military presence), and historical events (instability).

One difficulty in understanding the history of Petra lies in marking the impact of major transitions that affected the political structure and economy of the city. Some events, such as the 19 May 363 and the 418 earthquakes (Russell 1980; Zohar et al. 2016; Zohar et al. 2017) can be identified readily in the archaeological record. On the other hand, some major disruptions present ambiguous archaeological evidence, such as the Roman annexation of Nabataea in ad 106. The archaeological evidence is frustratingly equivocable: the original purpose of ballista balls reused in a possible second-century ad leveling fill in a major civic building of downtown Petra could or could not be interpreted as a Nabataean defensive tool or as the result of a possible Roman assault (Joukowsky 2017, 369–382); the presence of destruction events in various parts of the city dating to the late first/early second century ad based on ceramic assemblages may be due to an otherwise unknown earthquake (Parker 2009) or to internal instability possibly related to the annexation (Fiema 2017, 275). A further complicating factor is that the Nabataean fine ware chrono-typology upon which the date of this general destruction derives has been recently challenged (Erickson-Gini and Tuttle 2017); similarly, the date of this destruction is based on the presence/absence of coins issued by the

last Nabataean king Rabbel II, not considering the likely long local use of these coins during the second century ad. Clarifying the debate regarding the impact of the Roman annexation further suffers from weakness of the literary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence, from a lack of clarity in literary sources on the annexation process (Cass. Dio 68.14; Amm. Marc. 14.8.3) to descriptions of apparent conflicts between Romans and Nabataeans reported in Safaitic graffiti, some possibly linked to this event (Sartre 1985, 63–72; Macdonald 2014; al-Otaibi 2015), further complicated by the elusive reference to *Arab(ia) adqvis(ita)*—instead of *capta*—on some Trajanic coins (Vitale 2017, 108–111). In fact the scarcity of literary sources (the best compendium for the Nabataean world remains Hackl et al. 2003), and the secondhand and vague nature of many ancient depictions of the city provides little insight throughout its history. For example, Diodorus's account of Petra ("the rock") might actually not be referring to Petra at all, and Strabo's reliance on Athenodoros of Tarsus presents an indirect account that may be biased by Athenodoros's role as Octavius's preceptor and likely personal envoy at the royal capital sent to endorse the dynastic transition between Malichos I 62–30 bc and Obodas II 30–9 bc (Tholbecq 2009; *contra* Graf 2009). Epigraphy hardly suffices to complement the image with about one hundred Greek, not even fifteen Latin, and fewer than one thousand Nabataean inscriptions, 90 percent of which are signatures (Nehmé 2000). With the major exception of the ca. 140 carbonized papyrus rolls discovered in 1993 in the "Petra Church," a sixth-century private archive written in Greek which provides a unique insight on local life during the Byzantine period (Arjava et al. 2018), locally produced sources are remarkably poor compared to, e.g., Bostra, Jerusalem, or Palmyra. Petra's other unique feature is its sandstone environment, which favored the development of technical skills and the creation of world-famous rock-cut monuments still visible today. The layout of the urban center largely follows the complex topography provided by the sandstone, crossed east to west by Wadi Musa and "encircled by steep mountains" to quote Strabo (*Geog*. 16.4.21), which contained various necropoleis, including the well-known rock-cut monumental tomb façades. The urban area expanded in various wadis and surrounding massifs, defining several neighborhoods, sometimes in very remote areas, linked by a network of pedestrian tracks (figs 48.1–48.2).

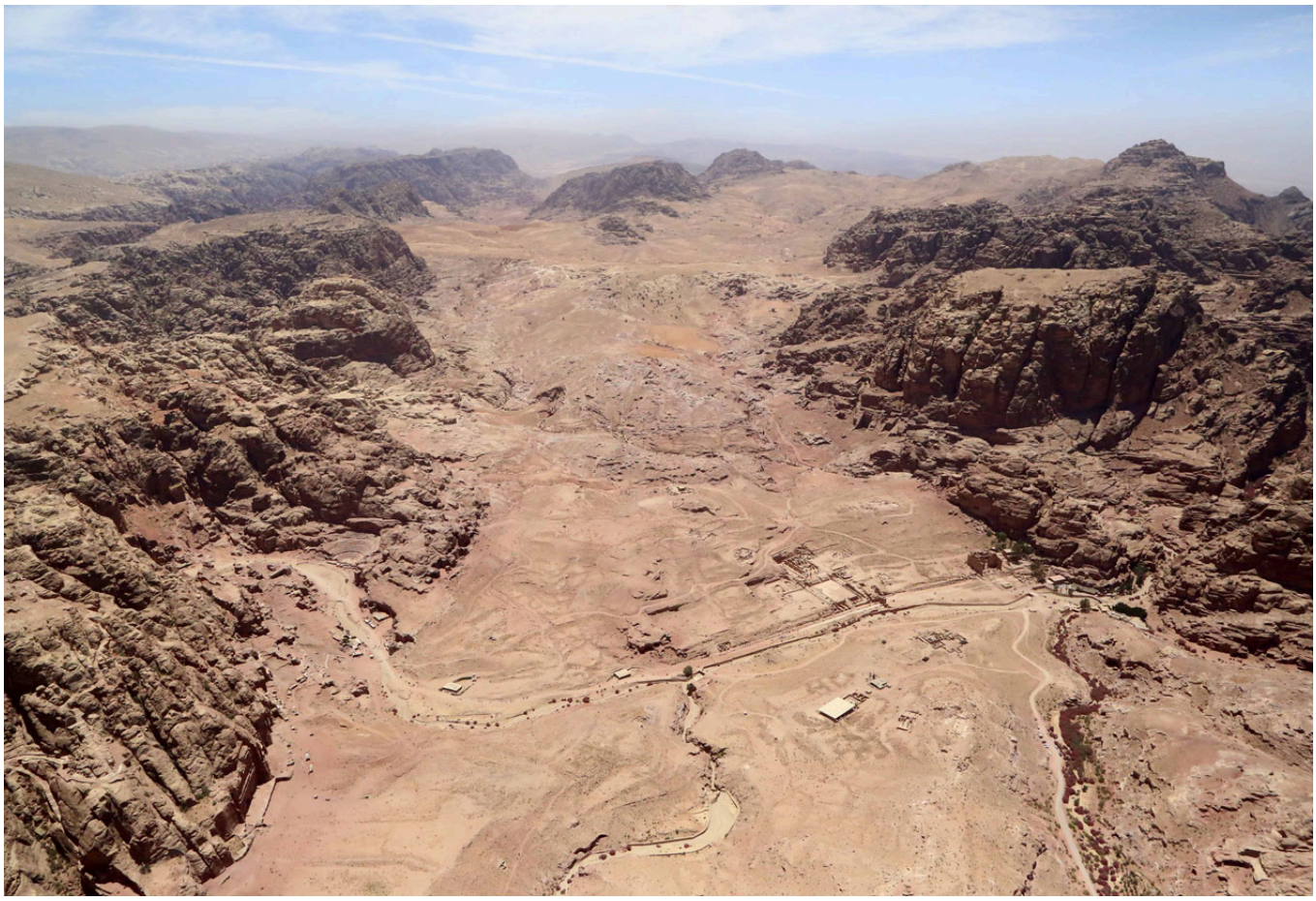

FIGURE 48.1. Petra. Aerial view of downtown Petra towards South (courtesy Wings for Science for the MAFP. Data provided by Adrien Normier and Clémentine Bacri as part of the ORA project Wings for Science (www.wingsforscience.com)).

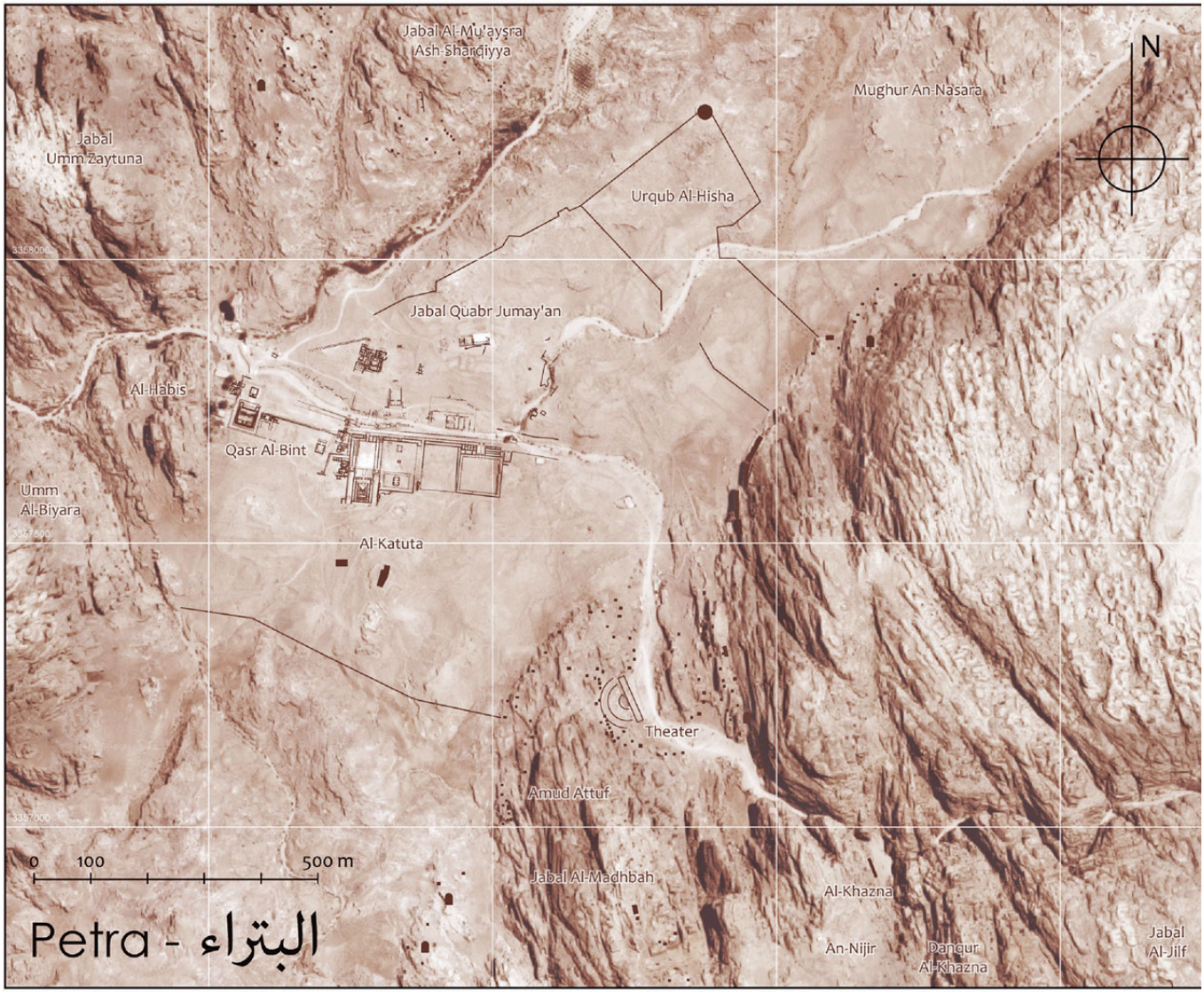

FIGURE 48.2. Petra. Zenital view of downtown Petra (Thibaud Fournet, MAFP).

In this respect, Petra differs radically from usual classical urban models. However, Petra was strongly linked to its surrounding limestone massifs (Jebel esh-Shara), which provided essential perennial springs and other natural resources (Kennedy 2021). The city relied heavily on surrounding hamlets such as ancient Gaia/el-Gi (modern Wadi Musa) and Khirbet Nawafleh that, in contrast to the inner city, were continuously occupied at least from the first century bc until the modern era (Amr and al-Momani 2011). The essential hinterland of Petra, its second core, provided enough raw material (clay, water, and fuel) to supply workshops such as the pottery kilns found in Zurrabeh that were in use at least till the sixth century ad (Amr and al-Momani 2001). These suburban areas from both the limestone and sandstone ranges, such as Beidha, also provided substantial parts of the food supply (herds, cereals, vegetable, fruits) of the ancient city (Bouchaud et al. 2017; Ramsay 2017).

Petra during the Nabataean Period (Fourth Century BC–AD 106)

Scholars recently have focused on evidence regarding the establishment of Nabataean Petra, which has been gathered in published conference proceedings (Mouton and Schmid 2013). There are at least two distinct Iron Age settlements in the Petra basin (Umm al-Biyara and Tawilan) that were occupied until the seventh/sixth century BC, to be compared to the Edomite capital of Busayra farther north that dates up to the fourth/third century BC. However, occupation with a unique material culture distinct from these Iron Age settlements was reached in deep soundings excavated in downtown Petra, on the southern bank of the Wadi Musa close to the riverbed, in the area of Qasr al-Bint (Renel and Mouton 2013) and under the Roman colonnaded street (Graf et al. 2022). These artifacts, associated with terraces following the natural slope of the wadi banks, date back to the late fifth/early fourth century BC, according to ^{14}C analysis. This occupational evidence predates literary sources recording a siege of Petra by the Antigonids at the end of the fourth century BC, which had marked the earliest evidence of the city's existence (Patrick 2015). In addition, an array of Hellenistic surface and residual archaeological material found in later contexts indicates that the foothills of el-Habis overlooking Wadi Musa sheltered the earliest urban nucleus of Petra. The slopes below el-Habis at this time were probably covered by terraces occupied by tents, which were then transformed in the late third century and second century BC into the earliest large-scale buildings found to date in the city.

The written evidence suggests that these buildings slightly postdate the establishment of royal leadership and an extended economic framework associated with the Nabataeans in general. The very first mention of a Nabataean king in the second quarter of the third century bc comes from an epigram of Posidippus of Pella (Hackl et al. 2003, 586–587), and the presence of Nabataean merchants is mentioned around 260–258 bc in the Hawran, known through the Zeno archives (Hackl et al. 2003, 363–367). Locally found Hellenistic coins and imported ceramic material confirm that by the third and second century bc Petra was already involved in long-distance trade. These late third- and second-century bc buildings near al-Habis also fit the earliest references in 168 bc of Petra as the seat of the Nabataean authority referred to in the flight of the former Hasmonean high priest Jason from Petra (2 Maccabees 5:8; Hackl et al. 2003, 589–592) and by an inscription dated to 129 bc mentioning an embassy of Priene to a king in Petra (Hackl et al. 2003, 126–127). This urban-built nucleus was likely surrounded by temporary housing in the adjacent suburbs, possibly evidenced by contemporary dumps found under later constructions on the Zantur hills. While no public monuments dating back to this period have been identified, early monumental funerary architecture can be linked to the third and second centuries bc. The cubic rock-cut monolithic tombs, so-called Djinn blocks, originally decorated with one or two rows of crowsteps, have been found along two major routes into the city center, at the entrance of Bab as-Sîq (east), and at Wadi ath-Thughrah (southwest). These monuments reflect a northwestern Arabian architectural tradition, seen in third- and second-century bc mud-brick cubic tombs in both Mleiha (UAE) and Qaryat al-Faw (Saudi Arabia). Petra's religious life only materially manifests in the late second century bc/early first century bc, with the earliest being the so-called Obodas Chapel, a tribal gathering place in Petra's southern suburbs that consists of an early rock-cut chamber associated with a possible built platform, where archaeologists found food leftovers linked to banquets and echoing ritual offerings (Thol becq and Durand 2013). This religious venue was subsequently enlarged and transformed twice, first in the mid-first century bc and then at the beginning of the first century ad, until it was finally abandoned after the Roman annexation. Thus, the general image we get of fourth- to late second-century bc Hellenistic Petra consists of at least partly pastoral populations slowly

appropriating and urbanizing space and seemingly recognizing an authority established in Petra. Since the name of the main Nabataean god Dushara seems to link to the local Jabal Shara's, it is likely that this lineal authority belonged to one of the earliest tribes settled in the area.

The mid-first century bc–first century ad period presents a radically different picture, with Petra representing the seat of Nabataean royal power in a distinctly Hellenistic manner despite its existence in a world getting inexorably more Roman, characterized by the vanishing of other Near Eastern independent local dynasties (Ituraeans, Emesans, Kommagenians). Domestic and public space within the Wadi Musa basin developed rapidly in the mid-first century bc–first century ad, presenting architectural and decorative programs that includes a shared vocabulary (e.g., the so-called Nabataean blocked-out capital, wall painting, and stucco revetments), echoing designs and monuments (e.g., the *stibadium*, mausoleum) from prestigious contemporary—Alexandrian, Judaean—courts, along with a strong persistence of indigenous traditions (Tholbecq 2024). This royal discourse was expressed mostly in downtown Petra through palatial, religious, and funerary monuments.

The economic and monumental peak of the Nabataean capital usually is linked to the reigns of Obodas II (30–9 bc) and Aretas IV (9 bc–ad 40). The emblematic monument of this period is the famous "Khazneh," a dynastic rock-cut tomb that has been securely dated by the excavation of earlier tombs partly condemned by the carving of the Khazneh (Kropp 2013, 199–205). It is likely also contemporary with the paving of the Siq at the end of the first century bc, and thus the converging lines of evidence suggest that the Khazneh was planned as a new dynastic monument either by Obodas II or by Aretas IV, possibly after the death of the latter's first wife Ḫuldū, between ad 16 and 18/19. Similarly, the earliest of the ca. 620 tomb façades of Petra (the "non-classical" Hegra and Double Pylon types) date to the same period, at least after ca. 50 bc, if not earlier (Wadeson 2013). The rock-cut façade tomb's shape results from the carving of a single face of the earlier three-dimensional cubic monuments, decorated with single or double rows of crowsteps, or sommital opposed angular semi-crowsteps, together with other decorative elements like Doric friezes, Egyptian cornices, and pediments belonging to both the Alexandrian and eastern Mediterranean decorative *koinai*. As shown by the Turkmaniyyeh inscription, the only known detailed tomb inscription from Petra (*CIS* II 350) and by the so-called Roman Soldier funerary complex of Wadi Farasa, these tomb façades are preceded by courtyards (sometimes provided with porticoes) containing gardens and funerary facilities like cisterns and *triclinia* (Schmid 2012).

The location of the Royal Palace has remained a polemic matter, although evidence now points to the pseudo-Great Temple, which included some royal reception rooms in its later first century bc Phase II (Joukowsky 2017, 18–19). These rooms consist of a ca. 32 by 28 m hall that had a row of 6 columns at the rear and 2 × 8 columns along its long sides, while the fourth opened on to a front courtyard (an original stage of the "small hexagonal pavements" forecourt) that at this phase did probably not contain a distyle *in antis* façade. This reception hall presumably contained the audience room of the royal palace likely built under the reign of Obodas II. Similar to the exceptional isolated *oecus* in Beidha (Bikai et al. 2008), this reception hall belongs in terms of plan and function to a well-established tradition of Near Eastern palatial buildings (Kropp 2013, 93–173). The primitive palatial reception hall apparently was radically transformed during the reign of Aretas IV through the construction of a new tetrastyle façade (pseudo-Great Temple Phase IV). At the same time, a garden terrace and a monumental pool were constructed immediately east of this complex and formed with the so-called Middle and Upper Markets a large complex overlooking the valley (Bedal 2013, 626). No evidence for the *basileia* exists for this period although there are several good candidates. For instance, excellent possibilities for the main official royal complex are an unexcavated major multiple

courtyards complex situated on the northwestern slope overlooking the Qasr al-Bint (fig. 48.3) and interconnected peristyle courtyards (including the so-called Building B [fig. 48.4] excavated by French archaeologists) situated immediately east of the temple, together with a monumental building rapidly described in the early twentieth century in "Zibb Fira'ûn" and overlooking the so-called Great Temple (Bachmann et al. 1921, 62–64).

FIGURE 48.3. Petra. Qasr al-Bint temple (François Renel, MAFP).

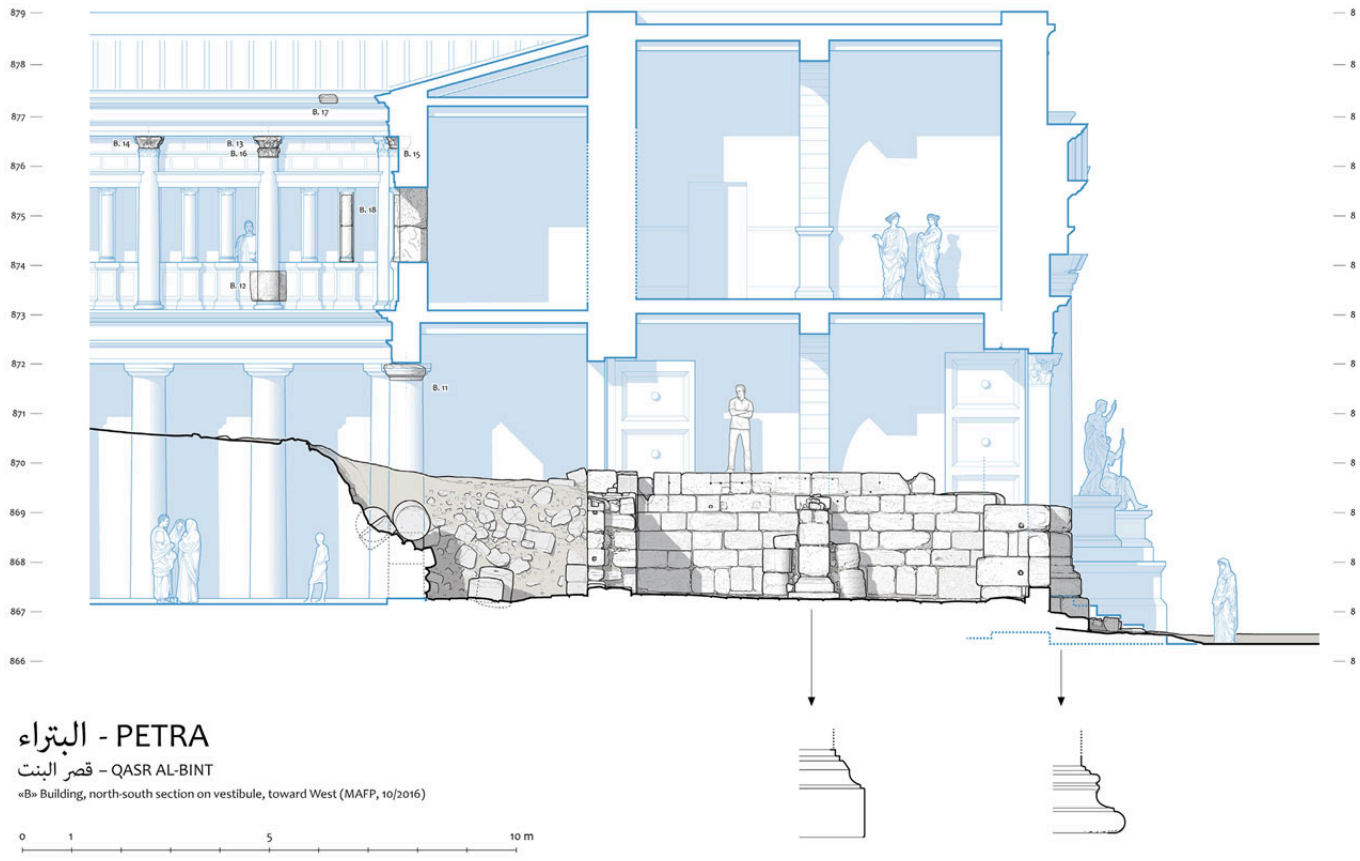

FIGURE 48.4. Petra. The "Building B," architectural reconstruction (Thibaud Fournet, MAFP).

Similarly, the area situated in front of the Palace tomb has recently been interpreted as a well-irrigated *paradeisos* likely linked to the upper elite (Fiema and Schmid 2014). Additionally, Bachmann described another "Royal Palace" that he identified on the northern bank of the wadi (Bachmann et al. 1921, 68–72).

The architectural program at Petra's center extends along the Wadi Musa, along which an 18 m wide colonnaded street was built in the later first century bc–first half of the first century ad; it led to Qasr al-Bint (Fiema 2008, 164), the main Nabataean temple of Petra whose temenos was originally decorated with now lost Ionic porticoes. This earlier street was possibly longer than its Roman successor, especially on its western end, which may have extended farther west into the actual temenos of Qasr al-Bint, in its Roman phase (Augé et al. 2016, 264–269). Qasr al-Bint is an exceptionally well-preserved temple, measuring 31.50 by 31.50 m and sitting on a 38.5 by ca. 35 m platform (Zayadine et al. 2003). The structure was built at the turn of the millennium, along with a two-story courtyard building (so-called Building B) which numbers among the most exquisite Nabataean buildings ever excavated in the city center (Tholbecq and Renel 2019). Nabataean royal power radically shaped late first century bc downtown Petra through its monumental building program.

At the same time, Nabataean private architecture developed rapidly, in both free-standing and rock-cut forms (Kolb 2007). Free-standing, sophisticatedly elaborated and decorated houses with courtyards are found on the hills close to the city center (Ez-Zantur) or on surrounding heights (Umm al-Biyyarah, Jabal Khubthah) while less-sophisticated domestic spaces covered most of the city center, and decorated rock-cut houses seem to prevail in the remote suburbs along Wadi as-Siyyagh and in an-Nasarah. The suburban residents had local places of worship on the heights, or "high places" surrounding their residences, such as

Madhbah, J. Harûn, J. Numayr, J. Khubthah, Râs Hamra, along with others in wadis and isolated locations (e.g., Madras, "Obodas Chapell"). While the downtown public temples such as the Temple of the Winged Lions possibly served the larger community, the smaller places of worship scattered around the city and its suburbs might have been reserved for specific subgroups that reflect the social tribal structure of Nabataean society (Nehmé 1997; Tholbecq 2016).

Petra during the Roman Period (AD 106–395)

Even beyond the problematic archaeological and historical data related to the Roman annexation mentioned above, the nature of Roman Petra remains obscure. Second-century Petra has a newly developed urban plan that imprinted a Roman mark on the former Nabataean religious and political center, with all the expected Roman public facilities and political programs of a provincial city: the colonnaded street was paved and refurbished with new colonnades, and public fountains were built where the streets' orientation changed following the classical model (Bachman's so-called small-theater and the two opposite *nymphaea* close to the entrance of the "Upper Market"; Kanellopoulos 2001). All of the major public buildings along the colonnaded street were transformed. For example, the original propylaeum of the so-called Great temple was remodeled—and one should here think about this missing propylaeum as a possible original entrance for the Nabataean royal palace and a setting for the so-called 1967 Group of Sculptures found nearby (McKenzie 1990, 134–135); the former Nabataean royal audience hall was transformed into a civic auditorium or *odeum* (Balty 2005, 145–146) that underwent further internal transformations in the later second century AD (Frederiksen 2017, 185). Similarly, a new "Schrankenbau" (the Temenos Gate) was built at the western end of the colonnaded street, opening on to the possibly reshaped Qasr al-Bint temenos (Kader 1996, 108–144). This main temple of the city was equally refurbished with monumental marble steps and a new outer altar. A likely planned but never-finished western entrance to the temenos was transformed into an absidial monument honoring the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. A new but unfortunately poorly excavated Roman hexastyle temple was erected between Qasr al-Bint and the so-called Great Temple, possibly housing the local civic imperial cult (Reid 2005). Following a process already initiated during the previous century on the Petra North Ridge, baths proliferate, with major public baths built on the northern bank of Wadi Musa, facing the "Middle Market" (Shiyyab 2008), in addition to multiple other baths, both downtown ("Great Temple"), in suburbs (Khrayrīb ʿIyāl ʿAwdah), and on very visible summits (Umm al-Biyyarah, J. Khubthah). Recent excavations on the northern limit of downtown Petra indicate that Nabataean houses built at the top of the ridge were condemned by the construction of a city wall at the turn of the first and second centuries AD, without attributing the initiative to the Nabataean or the Roman authorities (Parker and Perry 2013). Considering the granting of the title *Hadrianè Petra* in 129/130, these projects might be connected to some extent to Hadrian's eastern policy, either initiated by the Roman authorities or as a voluntary answer to regional events by the local elites. Further evidence of these monumental urban projects can be found elsewhere, not only in other cities of Provincia Arabia such as Gerasa which saw the erection of an arch (Detweiler 1938), but also the Hadrianic urban initiatives carried on in Jerusalem before the Second Jewish War (Goodman 2003; Weksler-Bdolah et al. 2014). The scattered evidence from second- and third-century Latin and Greek inscriptions reflects the normal life of a provincial city, with some inscriptions honoring emperors including Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Severus Alexander, Diocletian, and possibly

Maximian (*IGLS* XXI.4, 38–42; Gagos 2009), others mentioning civil and military officials (*IGLS* XXI.4, 45–48; e.g., the epitaph of a member of the local *boule* likely dead in 216/217, *IGLS* XXI.4, 68) or referring to the Roman secular games organized in 204 in Rome by Septimius Severus (*IGLS* XXI.4, 1–8; Christol 1971).

This presence in the second century of a flourishing provincial city is followed by unknown events in the later second, third, and early fourth centuries when several unexplained destructions or abandonments occurred in the domestic complex in Zantur III, in Qasr al-Bint "Area C," in "Temple of the Winged Lions," and in suburban areas like Wadi Sabra. The rest of the city, however, seems to continue without dramatic elaboration or expansion through the fourth century (e.g., Roman shops in the colonnaded street, houses on the Petra North Ridge that continue to be occupied until the 363 earthquake). It has been suggested that the brief abandonments could reflect the impact of disease epidemics, such as the "Galenic Plague" attested in Mesopotamia and Egypt, increased instability in the eastern provinces due to the Persian wars or the Palmyrene raids against Roman military targets epigraphically attested between 269 and 272 in Bostra (*IGLS* XIII.1, 9017). However, no evidence of the late second-century Galenic Plague affecting Petra or the region has been found, and Petra maintained a political and intellectual presence. For instance, Callinicos, a famous intellectual originally from Petra, maintained close relations with important political authorities, including dedicating a rhetoric treatise to Virius Lupus, the Roman governor of Arabia in the late 250s or 260s (consul in 278), writing a "History of Alexandria" in ten books, likely dedicated to Zenobia herself around 270, and preparing a eulogy to the emperor Aurelianus (Pernot 2010). In addition, the construction of a 4.7 ha legionary fortress in Udruh (anc. *Augustopolis*) ca. 10 km east of Petra in ad 300 (Kennedy and Falahat 2008) might reflect an official willingness to protect the prestigious metropolis of Petra in light of the damage to the legionary camp of the Legio III Cyrenaica in Bostra by Palmyrene troops, stressing the city's importance in the new political and military geography of the southern Levant.

Regardless of the archaeological ambiguity of post-annexation Petra, what is nevertheless clear is that the 363 and 418 earthquakes severely impacted the city and caused radical disruptions in the later fourth–early fifth centuries ad, in an already diminished urban environment. The dramatic 363 earthquake was followed by construction initiatives in Ez-Zantur, al-Khubthah, and by the purported restoration of the city wall reported in a ca. ad 400 epigram (Moralee 2011; Tracy 2020). These seismic events were followed by destructive floods in the early fifth century identified in the Roman shops along the colonnaded street. The Nabataeans maintained rigorous water control measures, and these floods may suggest poor quality repairs on the dams and the hydraulic systems at this time. An event attested in the Bar Sauma conversion episode of the city in 420–423, in which the city wall (likely a dam) collapsed after heavy rains provoked by the monk might directly echo the 418 earthquake or subsequent flooding events. In general, the Roman period is marked by a progressive economic and demographic shift from downtown Petra to the fruitful highlands of the Jabal Shara and the eastern steppe, along with the increased presence of the military within Petra's eastern environs.

Petra during the Byzantine Period (ad 395–Early Seventh Century ad)

The image of Byzantine Petra has radically changed since the early 1990s, due to the focus on excavation of the northern slope of Wadi Musa's several churches (Fiema 2002; 2013; Bikai et al. 2020). At this time, the use of previous sacred spaces such as the Urn tomb, one of the more

prestigious rock-cut tombs from the royal necropolis, was transformed—in the case of the Urn tomb, according to its dedication, it was reconfigured into a church in 446 (*IGLS* XXI.4, 50). In the late fourth–early fifth centuries at the earliest, a three-aisled church (the "Ridge Church") was built in the northern *intra muros* neighborhood, followed in the second half of the century by a much larger and more elaborate three-naved church, preceded by a narthex and a *baptisterium* (the "Petra Church") and dedicated, according to the sixth-century AD Petra Papyri, to the "Blessed and All-Holy Lady." A third but smaller complex (the "Blue Chapel") was built at about the same time, possibly as a private chapel and residence for the local bishop. These three construction projects heavily used spolia (columns, capitals, marble, etc.) from monumental buildings in downtown and northeastern Petra made unusable by the earthquakes. In the suburbs, at the top of J. Harun, a monastery was built in the later fifth century, on an earlier pagan shrine erected in a remote area away from the ancient city (Fiema 2016). No Byzantine dwellings have been identified through archaeological excavation and hence a rather desolate general image of a city with only a few inhabitants in isolated spots like the al-Katuteh villa (Khairy 2013) or the partly reoccupied ruined colonnaded street. Even some of the old reinhabited shops underwent progressive abandonment in the course of the sixth and the early seventh centuries (Fiema 2008).

At the end of the sixth century/early seventh century ad, the "Petra Church" was destroyed by fire during renovations, and surviving rooms of the atrium along with areas of the now-abandoned Blue Chapel complex and Ridge Church were reused for domestic occupation, which ended with further collapse of the old churches due to earthquake activity in the mid-seventh century ad and later in the mid-eighth century ad, possibly in 749 (Fiema 2001, 91–118, 437). Up through and for some centuries beyond the sixth and seventh centuries ad the local inhabitants engaged in limited grazing and farming activities on leveled terraces among the ruins. Meanwhile, the monastery on Jebel Harun developed as a pilgrimage center in use until the end of the ninth century ad at least (Fiema 2016). Byzantine Petra had lost most of the city's former cohesion, with its core population apparently transferred to the eastern highlands, as illustrated by the Petra Papyri (between 528/529 and 592/593), which indicate numerous possessions owned by a wealthy local family in Petra's hinterland (Arjava et al. 2018). The new poles of urbanity seem to shift toward the steppe, its military camps and networks of villages. Unlike many cities in the region that experienced economic and urban development at the dawn of the Umayyad period, it is an image of desolation that prevails in the brilliant former Nabataean capital shortly before the outbreak of Islam. In other words, several natural factors, and major political and economic changes relegated the ancient Nabataean capital to the status of an isolated Christian and ultimately middle Islamic pilgrimage site on the Jabal Harun, which served as a pretext for its rediscovery by Johann L. Burckhardt in 1812.

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CHAPTER 49

EASTERN ARABIA AND THE PERSIAN GULF IN THE H ELLENISTIC AND LATE ANTIQUE PERIOD

R. A. CARTER

Introduction

Following a late Iron Age marked by a low number of sites, a regional boom began in the third century BC, followed by a reconfiguration between the first and third centuries AD, and then contraction. The earlier phases saw the florescence of several major sites, namely, Thaj (Saudi Arabia), Qala'at al-Bahrain (Bahrain), Failaka F5 (Kuwait), Ed-Dur, Mleiha, and Dibba (UAE), which to varying degrees can be described as urban. There was an accompanying increase in smaller sites and rural settlement (Kennet 2007, 104). While both coastal and inland areas saw cultural and mercantile connections with the Graeco-Roman world, this was most evident in the islands of the central and northern Gulf (Bahrain and Failaka).

The regional chronology mostly relies on local site sequences, except for a common phasing used for the UAE and northern Oman between the late fourth century bc and the sixth century ad, whereby the late Pre-Islamic period, or *Pré-Islamique Récente* (PIR) is divided into five periods, PIR.A–PIR.E (Mouton and Cuny 2012; Mouton 1992). Figure 49.1 shows a summary. In this chapter the term "northern Gulf" refers to Kuwait; "central Gulf" refers to Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (henceforth Eastern Province); and "lower Gulf" refers to the Gulf-facing parts of the Oman Peninsula, with the latter including both the UAE and northern Oman.

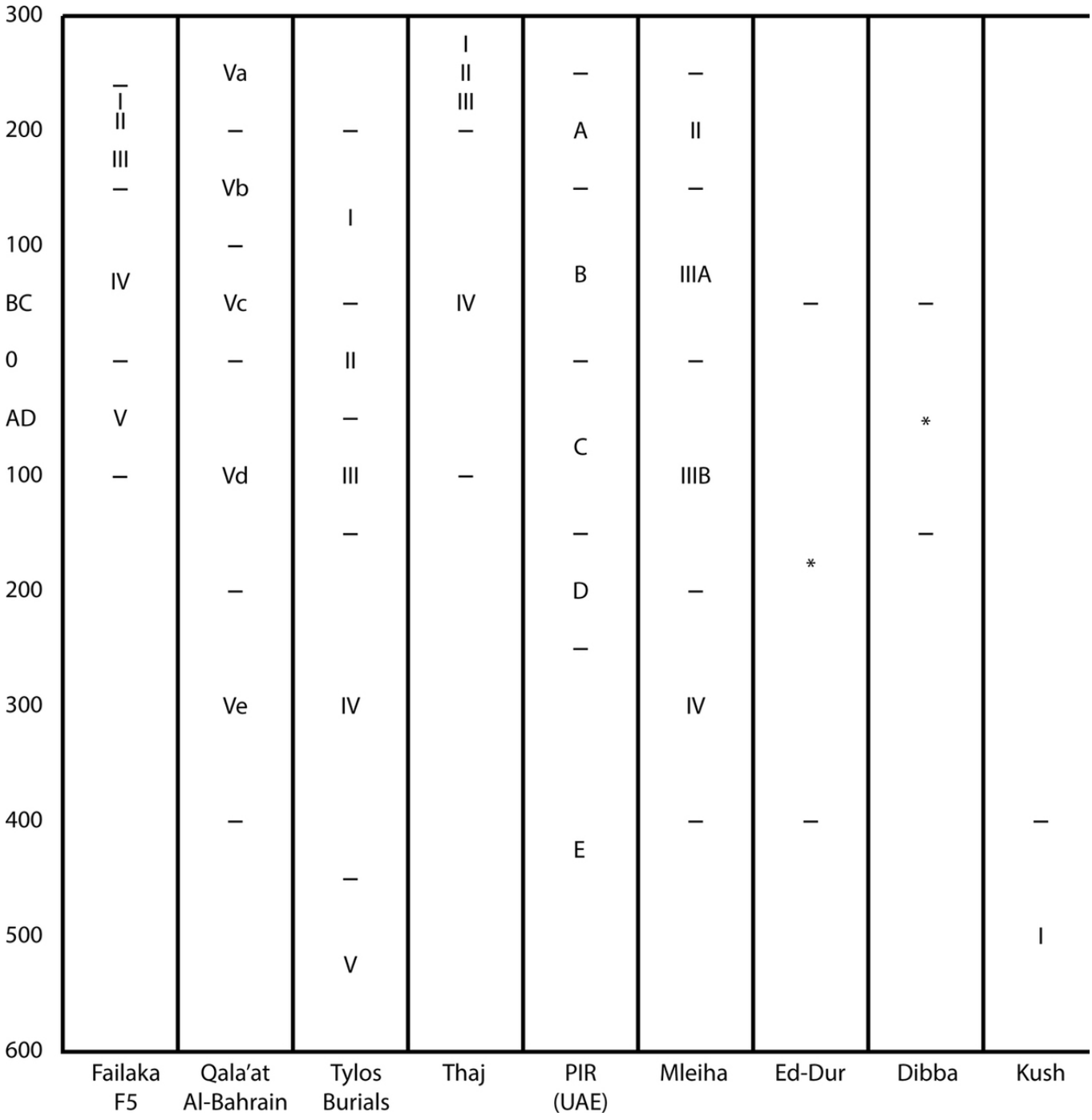


FIGURE 49.1. Regional chronologies of the Gulf from the Hellenistic to the Sasanian periods. Table by R. A. Carter.

Major Sites

The chief characteristics of the major sites have been summarized previously (Mouton 2009; Kennet 2007; Mouton and Cuny 2012), but a brief reiteration is helpful here. They are discussed below in geographical order, northwest to southeast. Figure 49.2 shows their locations.

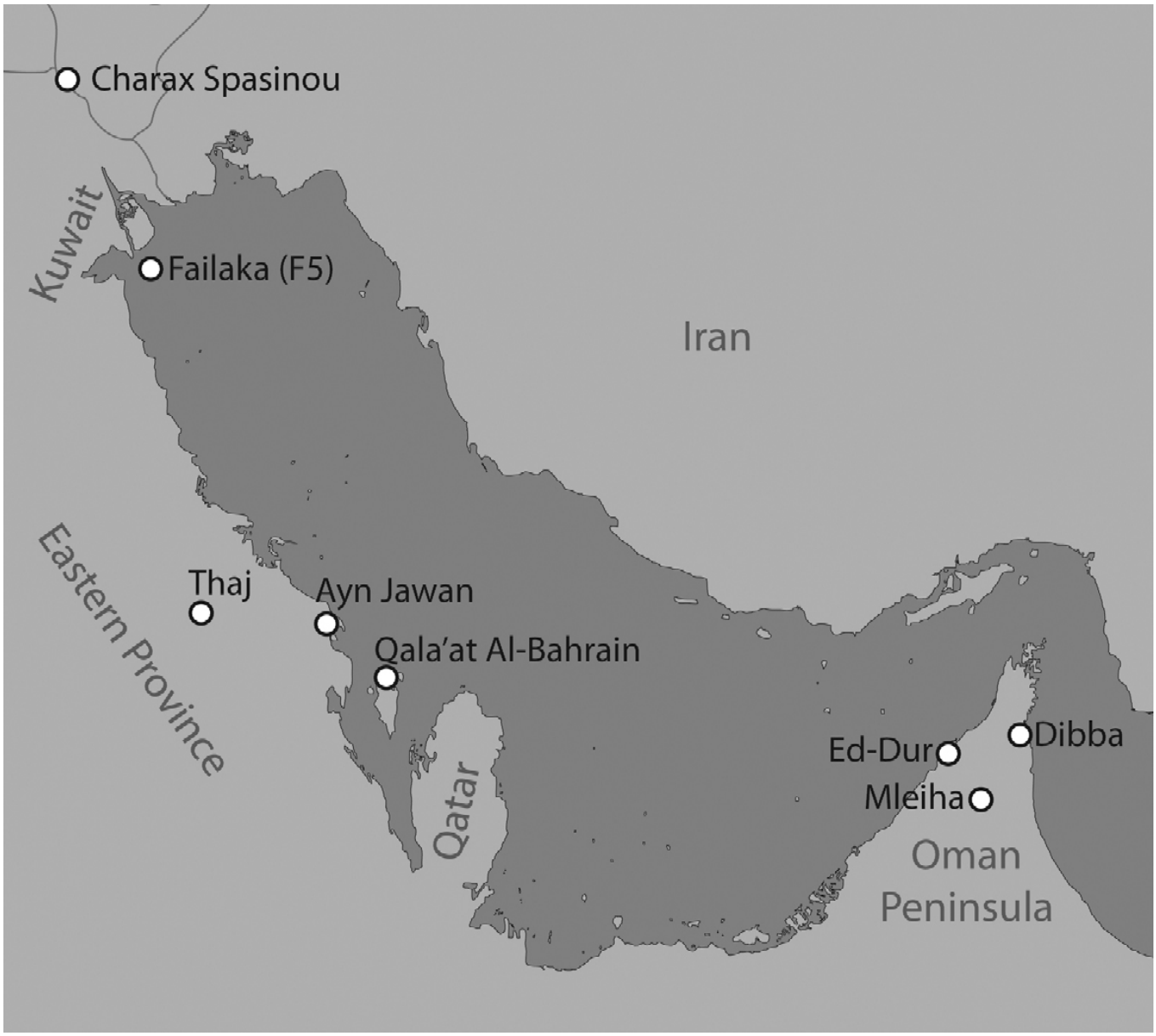


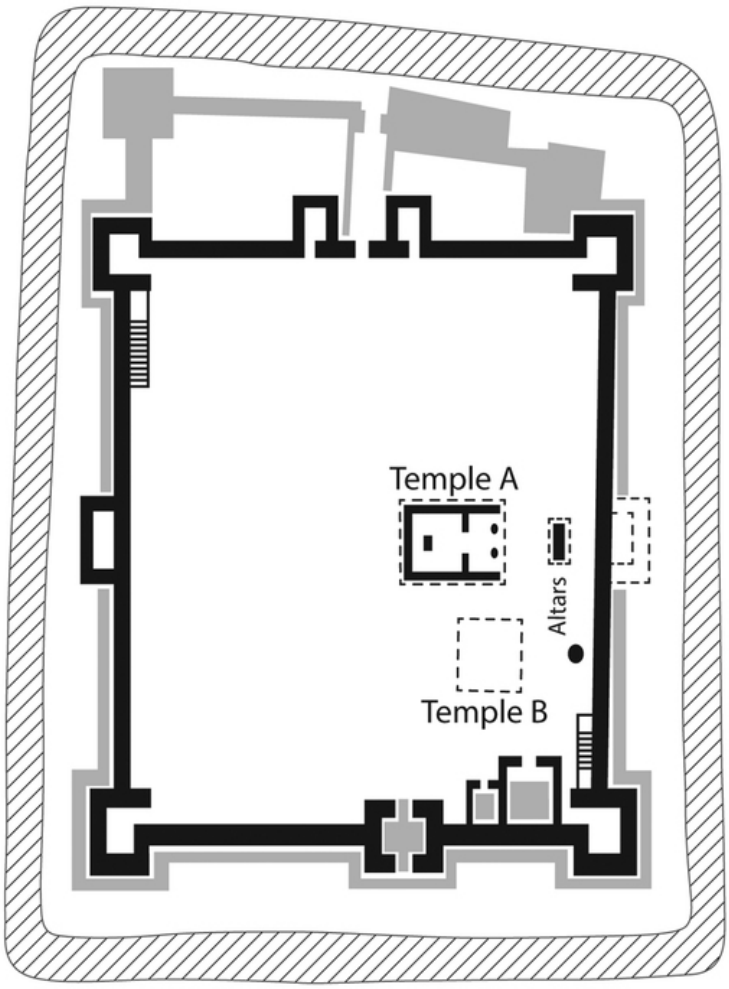
FIGURE 49.2. Map of the Gulf showing location of key sites. Map by R. A. Carter.

Failaka F5 (Tell Sa'id)

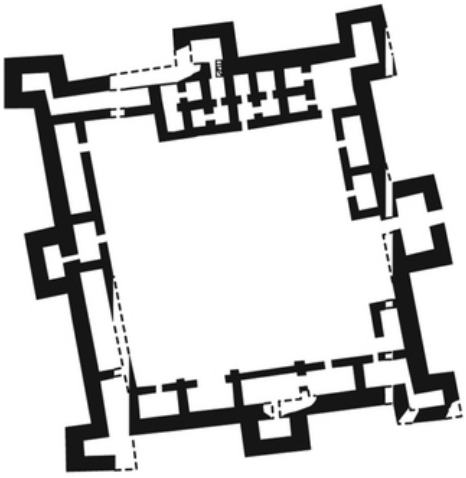
This fortress was built on Failaka Island, Kuwait, in the third century and abandoned in the first century AD; it is interpreted as a Seleucid military foundation or naval base. There was an earlier Greek and Achaemenid presence nearby. Five phases of occupation began with a fortress around 60 m across, with four square corner towers and gatehouses on the northern and southern walls, and possible barracks (fig. 49.3: A). Two temples were found inside, one (Temple A) having obvious Greek characteristics, with classical proportions and columns with Ionic capitals and Achaemenid-style bases (perhaps from an older pre-Seleucid building). Temple B was poorly preserved. In the second half of the third century BC a third temple (B6) was built on the shoreline outside the fortress, containing an altar with a painted inscription to Artemis. An extensive rebuild of the fortress occurred toward the end of the third century (Phase III), including an extension northward, ramparts added to the towers, and a moat. This is believed to relate to the reimposition of Seleucid power in the Gulf by Antiochus III, as also

indicated by his historical visit to Gerrha. The inner part of the fortress progressively filled with dense architecture during its occupation (Potts 1990, 155–158, 161–163, 195; Gachet 1990, 167; Mouton 2009, 187–188).

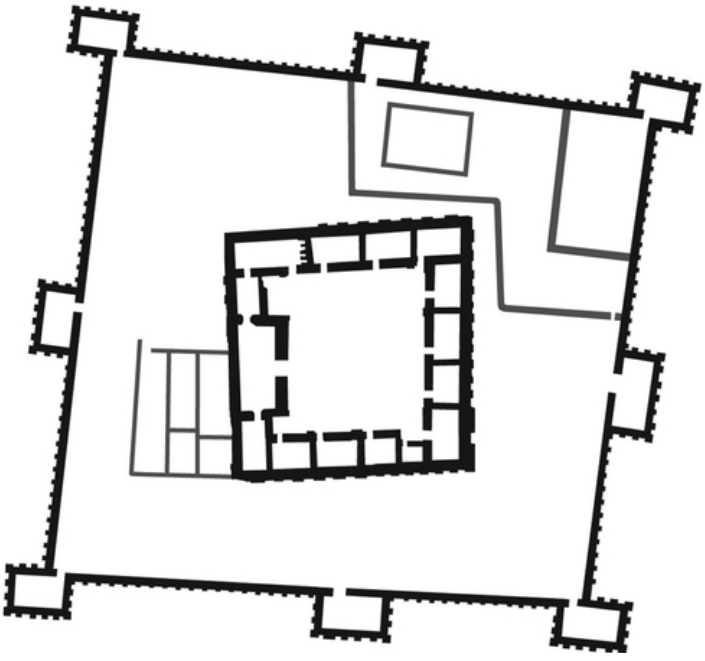
A: Failaka F5



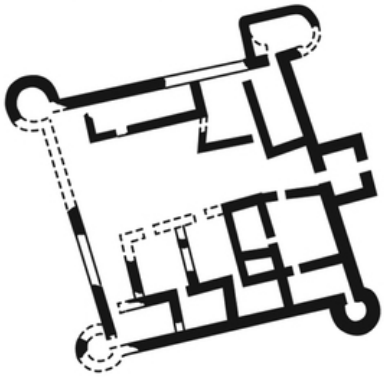
B: Mleiha Area CW



C: Mleiha Area H



D: Ed-Dur Area F



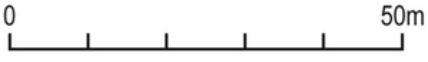


FIGURE 49.3. Fortifications. A: Failaka F5 (third century **BC**–first century **AD**), inner architecture omitted except for temples, Phase III modifications shaded in gray; B: Mleiha Area CW (**AD** 150–250); C: Mleiha Area H (**AD** 150–250); D: Ed-Dur Area F (**AD** 150–250). Redrawn by J. Bastek from Potts 1990, Benoist et al. 2003, Mouton et al. 20 12; Lecomte 1993.

A Greek inscription was found just south of Temple A (the "Ikadion Inscription," also called the "Ikaros Inscription"), dated to 239 bc or 243 bc, in which Anaxarchos, acting on the instructions of Ikadion according to the wishes of the king (Seleucus II, 246–225 bc), ordered the temple of the Savior Goddess to be moved (Potts 1990, 186–193). The original location may have been at Tell Khazneh, an earlier poorly preserved sanctuary to the north (Hannestad 1994, 591–592. Also Salles 1986b, 119; Potts 1990, 178). Two further Greek inscriptions were by Soteles the Athenian. These appear to be older than the Ikadion inscription. A handful of inscribed pot sherds in Greek and a fragmentary stone inscription in Greek were also found (Marcillet-Jaubert 1990; 1986; Potts 1990, 184, 193–194).

Occupation at F5 tailed off subsequently, with Temple A falling into disuse in Phase IV (starting ca. mid-second century bc), and "crude stone houses" built over the disused fortress during the final Phase V (late second century bc–first century ad). In these phases, Characene coins are found, and likely Characene glazed ceramics ("BI-Ware") but there is no evidence for refortification under the newly independent Characene state (Potts 1990, 164; Salles 1990; Han nestad 1994, 594).

Thaj

This large walled inland site in Saudi Arabia is a candidate for the city of Gerrha, a major trading town described by Strabo, Pliny, Polybius, Agatharchides, and Ptolemy, also known from inscriptions in Yemen (Robin 2016, 223–224; cf. Potts 1990, 95; 1984). Test excavations and survey revealed a dense urban plan of stone masonry, within a 4.5 m wide stone city wall covering a parallelogram of ca. 39 ha, the longest side measuring ca. 725 m, with four corner towers and turrets projecting every 40 m or so. A large projecting gateway with buttressed walls is found on the southern side. There is no regular grid plan, but the structures include large stone buildings, each with rooms arranged around a courtyard. Deep soundings revealed ca. 3.40 m of stratigraphy with eleven levels divisible into four main periods, the earliest three of which were considered to be "Seleucid," perhaps all of the third century BC. Recent excavations refer to five occupational phases, the second of which was dated by radiocarbon to somewhere between first century BC and second century AD, and the fourth to between the first and third century AD. Occupation continued into the fourth century AD according to a final radiocarbon date and surface coinage (Rohmer et al. 2018; Gazdar et al. 1984, 56, plates 63–65; Potts 1993b: 90, 92–94; Mouton 2009, 191).

To the southeast of the walled area extensive settlement remains were noted, and the whole is flanked by at least a thousand tombs, mostly to the south (Laguardia et al. 2022). Also found were numerous funerary inscriptions carved onto stones in Hasaitic, a north Arabian language written in south Arabian script, presumed to be the language and script of the Gerrhaeans, but shared with neighboring peoples, most notably at Mleiha, UAE. It has been suggested that a site around modern Jubayl would have been the port of Thaj, but this is assumed only on the basis of a recent historical route to the coast (Potts 1990, 37, 73; Mouton 2009, 190–191, fig. 2). The coastal site of Ayn Jawan is a better candidate, with a large settlement mound, pottery comparable to Thaj, Hasaitic inscriptions, burial mounds, and a rich multiple burial of the first–second centuries ad (Potts 1993a).

Antiochus III's famous visit to Gerrha in 205 bc indicates that the town briefly acknowledged Seleucid suzerainty in the late third century bc. Antiochus granted the Gerrhaeans "perpetual peace and freedom" and extracted heavy tribute (Potts 1990, 93). Potts (1984) equates Gerrha etymologically with Hagar, a kingdom known from east Arabian coinage, and locates Gerrha/Hagar at Thaj, in line with Strabo's description of its position 2,400 *stades* from the head of the Gulf (then near Basra), in front of Tylos (Bahrain) and Arados. This identification is disputed: Robin equates Hagar with Hajar, an early Arabic name for the Al-Hofuf Oasis, and s that Gerrha must be located, undiscovered, around Al-Hofuf (Robin 2016, 226–227). No other major urban site of this date is known in the Eastern Province. The extensive "Salt Mine site" is sometimes proposed, but it has no city walls and scanty settlement remains (Bibby 1973, 40–44, figs. 37, 40; Lombard 1988; Mouton 2009, 192; Golding 1984, 165–166; Bibby 1973, 46–47; Potts 1990, 56–58).

Bahrain (Tylos)

Relevant sites in Bahrain include Qala'at Al-Bahrain and several large cemeteries. So far, no major buildings have been recovered, but the burials show that Bahrain was populous and well integrated into the Hellenistic, Roman, Characene, and Parthian worlds.

Occupation at Qala'at Al-Bahrain (QB City V) covers the entire tell, but architectural remains are disjointed. The ancient city wall stood in a ruinous state and was abutted with domestic architecture. Traces of streets and other domestic units were uncovered. A room with benches around its walls, just outside the ruined city wall, has been compared to the Greek *andron* (a room for entertaining male guests), but an equation with the Roman or Nabataean *triclinium* would be apt given its date (City Vd, late first–early second centuries ad) (Mouton 2009, 188–189; Højlund and Andersen 1994, 54, figs. 67–68 and plan 4A).

Large cemeteries have been excavated at Shakhoura, Hamad Town, Karranah, Janussan, and Abu Saiba, and there are reports of Tylos period burials elsewhere, either isolated or among cemeteries with graves of other dates, mainly in the northern and western parts of the main island of Bahrain (Herling and Salles 1993; Lombard and Salles 1984; Salles 1986a). These are discussed below with regard to religious practices and trade.

Kervran dates an adjacent coastal fortress to the Sasanian period, but the whole of this fortress should more likely be dated to around the thirteenth century ad, in keeping with its architecture and the date of its securely excavated material (Kervran 2005, 218, 26–27; Højlund 2006; Kennet 2007, 96).

Ed-Dur

The coastal site of Ed Dur, UAE, mainly dates from the first century BC to the second century AD, with limited occupation extending into the fourth century AD. It is situated on a shallow lagoon and has a dispersed settlement pattern similar to that of Mleiha, with which it is partially contemporary. A few scattered, small, simple stone-built houses are interspersed with scatters of pottery, ash, shell, and rubble, indicating extensive *'arish* (palm frond housing) across around 1 km of coastal dunes and plain. Many authors have interpreted it as a seasonal settlement, perhaps in a pattern of migration with Mleiha, and while this would fit the demands of the seasonal pearl fishery (which was already important at this time), the preponderance of *'arish* does not preclude permanent and dense occupation. Like Mleiha, cemeteries consisted of simple tombs and grouped elite tombs, but unlike burial sites in Mleiha, these clusters were dispersed in small groups within the site (Mouton 2009, 198–199; Haerinck 2003, 200).

Significant buildings include a temple to Shamash of the late first century bc/early first century ad and two small forts built in the second century ad and the third century ad,

respectively. The later one was accompanied by human and camel burials inside and outside the fort, apparently contemporary with its usage. The consensus is that occupation was restricted to the area of the third-century AD fort by the PIR.D period, giving an impression of contraction similar to that seen at Mleiha. A cemetery of ca. fifty-eight graves was found over and around the fort after its ruin, which can be assigned to the recently defined PIR.E period. The settlement was otherwise abandoned at this time but these graves indicate that the area was still frequented, perhaps by a nomadic group (Mouton 2009, 200; 2010, 202–203, figs. 19–20; Mouton and Cuny 2012, 178–179; Lecomte 1993, 195–196, fig. 15).

Mleiha

Mleiha is located at the foot of the gravel fans extending from the mountains of Oman, 50 km south-southeast of Ed-Dur. A process of settlement contraction and increased density of mud-brick architecture between the PIR.A and PIR.D (third century BC to third century AD) implies a process of sedenterization (Mouton 2010, 185).

The greatest extent was during the PIR.A (third–mid-second centuries BC), when it covered ca. 1.5 km × 1 km. Postholes across the site indicate palm frond (*'arish*) and/or wooden architecture, with no evidence of mud-brick or stone buildings. A couple of craft areas are indicated by softstone and copper-working (Mouton 2009, 195). Mud-brick architecture was restricted to a large external cemetery consisting of clusters of subterranean mud-brick-lined cist graves, each grouped around large elite "tower" tombs with above-ground superstructures. Similar tombs continued to be built into the PIR.B and PIR.C, with increasing use of stone (Bou charlat and Mouton 1998).

During subsequent phases the settlement area contracted, but the quantity of mud-brick buildings increased. Thus, during PIR.B (mid-second–first centuries BC), separate clusters of mud-brick dwelling units built up, each consisting of a few small simple buildings grouped together, each group separated from others by several dozen meters of open space (Mouton 20 09, 195–196; 2010, fig. 9). By the PIR.C (first–mid-second centuries AD) the dwellings became more heavily built, with more complex multiroomed buildings instead of loosely associated clusters of simple buildings (Mouton 2009: 196), though complex buildings also occur earlier, in the PIR.B (see Mouton 2010, fig. 10; and Jasim 2001).

By the PIR.D period, settlement at Mleiha became concentrated into a relatively limited 650 m stretch between a large mud-brick fort in the southwest, ca. 60 × 65 m with thirty-four rooms including those in the corner towers, side towers, and gatehouse (Area CW); and an even larger fortified enclosure to the northeast, ca. 70 m on each side, enclosing a large fortified courtyard building (Area H) (fig. 48.3). Two adjacent multiroomed houses were excavated in between (Area DA). None of the PIR.D buildings at Mleiha show clear evidence of occupation after the mid-third century AD (Benoist et al. 2003; Mouton et al. 2012, figs 2, 4; Mo uton 2009, 197). PIR.D is described as "the period of densest urbanisation" though the basis of this statement is unclear, as apart from the two large forts (CW and H) only two other buildings have been excavated (Area DA) (Mouton 2009, 197; Mouton and Cuny 2012, 184. For plans compare Mouton 2010, figs. 9, 10, and 12).

Dibba

Remarkably rich artifactual assemblages were recovered from a collective grave of the first centuries BC/AD at Dibba, which contained at least sixteen individuals, and a large grid-like building that appears to have combined the functions of warehouse and workshop. These attest to intensive maritime trade between the Roman world, southern Mesopotamia, and India. It is clear that many of the traded wares were locally consumed, as they appear at

Mleiha and Ed-Dur as well as in the Dibba grave. Dibba is notable as one of the candidates for the location of the "O(m)mana" in *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a "port of Persis" which traded with Barygaza in India, also mentioned by Pliny and others. Ed-Dur has also been cited as a possible location for Omana (Jasim 2006; Jasim and Yousif 2014; Potts 1990, 309–310).

Trade and Material Culture

Three broad phases can be discerned across the period in question, the first covering the period of strongest Hellenistic influence under the Seleucids and early Characene rulers, followed by a phase of intensive engagement in Roman trading networks, and finally a period when trade and material culture were reoriented toward the Parthian and Sasanian worlds.

Seleucid to Early Characene Trade and Material Culture, ca. 300–50 bc

The coastal areas of the central and northern Gulf were heavily involved in Hellenistic networks, while the inland areas and the Oman Peninsula were less so. Hellenistic traits were strongest on Failaka and Bahrain, with a significant proportion of ceramic types showing Greek influence from the beginning. In the Failaka fortress's later ceramic assemblage (Hannestad's Period II, late first century BC to early first century AD), the Greek influence is seen in the "BI-ware," a glazed ware of probable Characene manufacture which "was able to greet and enliven true Greek inspirations (*lagynos*, *phiale*, *kraters*, etc.) and to preserve oriental traditions in the same time." Likewise in Bahrain the glazed ceramic assemblages of Andersen's Phase I (ca. 200–50 BC) included the same forms influenced by Greek/Attic prototypes (Salles 1990, 329; Andersen 2007, 101–104, 214–216, 240. Salman and Andersen 2009, 7).

In contrast, archaeologists discern "a general absence of both Greek and Roman influence on the style of pottery from Thaj, unlike the pottery from Bahrain," and little or no evidence for a significant Greek contingent among the population of the Eastern Province. Nonetheless, Mediterranean trade goods are evident at Thaj, including "black glazed pottery" of the late fourth or first half of third century, Rhodian amphorae, and an eggshell ware perhaps made in Seleucid Iraq. Glazed "fish plates" and other bowls are comparable to material from Failaka, Seleucia, and Bahrain (Potts 2010, 378; Andersen 2007, 233; 2002; Andersen and Salman 2006, 114; Potts 1990, 43–44). The Gerrhaeans were active traders who linked southern Arabia with Mesopotamia, demonstrated by large amounts of frankincense and *stacte* rendered to Antiochus III, and by Agatharchides's report of Gerrhaean traders in Petra and Palestine in the second century bc. Strabo reports that the Gerrhaeans either carried their Arabian merchandise and aromatics by land or took them into Babylonia by sea and then up the Euphrates (Potts 1990, 93, 95).

Rhodian amphorae of the third–second centuries bc and "black glazed" pottery were also found at Mleiha and Failaka (Monsieur et al. 2013; Potts 1990, 271). In other respects, Mleiha's assemblage appears, like Thaj, to show less Hellenistic influence than Failaka and Bahrain.

Roman-Era Trade and Material Culture, ca. 50 bc–ad 150

The transition from Seleucid to Characene and Roman worlds is not indicated by a dramatic rupture. The "BI-ware" phase at Failaka shows continuing connections with Hellenistic Mesopotamia. In Bahrain Andersen's Phase II (ca. 50 BC–AD 50) every new ceramic type can "find very good prototypes in the West." This continued in Phase III (AD 50–150), when the

local wares were "highly influenced by contemporary prototypes used in the Roman Empire" (Salles 1990, 329; Andersen 2007, 101, 214–216; Salman and Andersen 2009, 7).

At Thaj a more limited influence was revealed: the Period IV ceramic assemblage showed signs of Roman or Nabataean influence in its rouletted bowls, but no claims are made for strong similarity with western assemblages. Strong connections between the ceramics of Mleiha and the western world are likewise absent, but at the coastal site of Ed-Dur there was an abundance of southern Mesopotamian (likely Characene) and occasional Roman ceramics, including *terra sigillata* and Campanian Ware. Similarly, at Dibba, pottery from India and Iran was noted, and glazed "Parthian" (likely Characene) ceramics were found along with possible Roman *terra sigillata* and amphorae (Potts 1990, 202–203; Haerinck 2003; De Paepe et al. 2003; Jasim and Yousif 2014, 64).

Other finds from all over the region show a strong trade in international luxury goods, particularly glass and jewelry, and especially at the coastal sites, indicating full participation in the boom times of Roman Indian Ocean trade. As well as involvement as middlemen and consumers in the through-trade of the Gulf, the region's inhabitants were producers of trade goods—namely, pearls—which enjoyed feverish popularity in the heart of the Roman Empire during and after the first century bc (Carter 2012, 15–19).

The tombs in Bahrain (Phase III), Ed-Dur, and Dibba contained large quantities of Roman glassware. *Aryballoi* (containers for bath oils) are common in Bahrain, implying Roman bathing practices. A study of the glass from the warehouse/workshop at Dibba confirmed that it was imported but could not determine whether it was from the Levant, Mesopotamia, or Egypt. Intaglios with Graeco-Roman themes are found at both Dibba sites, Mleiha, and Ed-Dur, the latter's Roman finds also including bronze objects and coins of Augustus and Tiberius (Andersen 2007, 27–54; Whitehouse 1998; Van Ham-Meert et al. 2018; Jasim 2006, 227, figs. 34, 59–61; Jasim and Yousif 2014, 71–72, figs. 41, 46–47; Haerinck 2003; Haerinck and Overlaet 2013, 31).

Remarkable jewelry from an elite girl's tomb at Thaj shows clear Graeco-Roman influence or direct import. While the stylized gold mask appears Arabian in inspiration, the funerary shroud bore gold foil discs with depictions of Zeus/Jupiter and possibly Artemis/Diana; the metal bed legs were in the form of female figures carved in the classical style; and rings and a pendant depict a helmeted male and probably Artemis/Diana. The second-century ad jewelry from a chamber tomb at Ain Jawan is described as "Roman or Roman inspired" by Potts, who compared it to jewelry from Palmyra, Dura Europus, and Hatra (Reeler and al-Shaikh 2010; al-Hashash et al. 2001, plates 47–56, 59; Potts 1993a, 112).

Imports from other regions show wide connections and include ivory combs with central Asian affiliations and Indian pottery from Dibba; there were also possible Indian carnelian and zoomorphic metal beads at Ed-Dur, the latter site also having coins from the Nabataean kingdom, Gaza, southern Persia, south Arabia (Hadramaut), and India (Jasim 2006, 224–226, figs. 49–57; Haerinck 2003). Seland shows that the Mediterranean and western Indian Ocean (including the Gulf) were connected by two routes, through Roman Egypt and the Red Sea, respectively, and via Palmyra, Charax, and the Gulf, which each had advantages at different times of year. Western influence and wares could also have arrived by land across the center of Arabia, from south Arabia via Qaryat Al-Faw. Much of the material from Qaryat al-Faw (Saudi Arabia) and Yemen is unmistakably Graeco-Roman in style, sometimes with evidence of an origin in Egypt (Seland 2011; 2013, fig. 3; al-Ansari 2010, 332–358, nos. 153–156, 158, 166–171, 189–201).

Parthian, Sasanian, and Later Roman Trade, ca. ad 150–450

Meaningful data are absent from the Thaj area and Failaka, but in Bahrain significant occupation continued and the tombs continued to fill with imported goods. However, western influence and trade in Roman glassware came to a halt at the start of Andersen's Phase IV (AD 150–450), with both ceramics and glassware from the tombs thenceforth relating to the Parthian and then Sasanian domains. This fall-off in Roman or Mediterranean-inspired finds has been linked to Parthian intervention in the Characene kingdom in the mid-second century (Andersen 2007, 144, 240; Potts 1988).

In the Oman Peninsula, however, wider trading patterns persisted among elite material culture into the third century ad, as indicated by finds from the Area H fortified building at Mleiha (destroyed ca. ad 250), where a Roman-style silver jar handle with three male figures was accompanied by gold imitation coins of Tiberius and Mediterranean amphorae. The majority of ceramics were imported, including kitchen wares and storage vessels from the Indo-Pakistan region, with glazed wares probably originating in Mesopotamia. At the adjacent fort in Area CW, also PIR.D, imported pottery included glazed wares, eggshell ware, and bitumen-lined amphorae, all probably from Mesopotamia, as well as an Egyptian amphora, Indian ceramics, and Fine Orange Painted Ware, likely from Iran. Glassware is probably Mesopotamian in origin. Ivory was also present, as well as south Arabian alabaster unguent pots, also found in earlier periods (Méry and Mouton 2013a, 44–45; 2013b: 55–56; Mouton et al. 2012, 210–211; Benoist et al. 2003, 71). The continuation of contacts with the Indian and Roman worlds into the mid-third century ad, shows that the Oman Peninsula, unlike Bahrain, continued to engage with the old Indian Ocean trading circuit linking the Mediterranean and India via Roman Egypt and the Red Sea.

Culture, Language, and Religion

Graeco-Roman Religion, Language, and Culture

Both Greek and indigenous east Arabian language and religious practices are found in the archaeological, epigraphic, funerary, and numismatic records, but Greek influence can be most clearly discerned in the coastal areas of the northern and central Gulf during the third and second centuries BC. This mirrors the pattern of trade and influence seen in the material culture.

The mid-third-century Temple A on Failaka has a classical Greek design, proportions, and architectural embellishments, while the instructions on the associated Ikadion Stele indicate a thoroughly Greek ideology, including the holding of games with gymnastic contests. The dedication of the later third-century beach-side temple to Artemis (B6) is also notable.

Around a century later (late second century bc) a certain Kephisodoros dedicated a temple (*naos*) in Bahrain to the Dioscuri Saviors, protectors of sailors, indicating the continuing importance of Greek religion to coastal communities under Characene rule. The "strongly expressed maritime identity" of these Greek or Hellenized coastal inhabitants is of long standing, as indicated by the earlier dedications on Failaka, namely, the Ikadion and Soteles inscriptions to the Savior Goddess (Soteira), Poseidon Asphaleios, Zeus Soter, and Artemis Soteira (Kosmin 2013, 75). Graeco-Roman influence may also be discerned in the practice of supplying the dead with single coins, especially in Phases II–III (50 bc–ad 150) of the Tylos graves (Salman and Andersen 2009, 174, table 69, 183).

Graeco-Roman culture is further indicated by the *andron* or *triclinium* at Qala'at Al-Bahrain Vd (first–second centuries ad), while the adoption of Greek serving vessels in Bahrain and

Failaka, particularly *lagynoi* and *kantharoi* associated with wine drinking, is also notable. The later Characene kingdom became less Hellenized as it fell under Parthian influence (Andersen 2002, 244; Kosmin 2013, 71, 73; Salman and Andersen 2009, 183, Højlund and Andersen 1994, 54–55, fig. 68).

Several miscellaneous finds display Greek influence. An undated bronze plaque depicting and naming the god Asklepios was "found in the sea" off Bahrain, while a glass lid or saucer from the Al-Hajjar cemetery shows a deity with rays coming from his head, perhaps Apollo, but possibly a Hellenized depiction of Shamash, as seen at Hatra. A scrap of Greek script is also found on a potsherd from Qala'at Al-Bahrain; the entire Greek alphabet is found molded onto a glazed pilgrim flask from Al-Maqsha; and small oval gold plaques from a burial depict either Zeus or Shamash, and an eagle (the symbol of both) (Lombard and Kervran 1989, nos. 152, 171, 212; Vine 1993, 63, 71). Some funerary monuments use Greek script to give (non-Greek) names of the dead.

Eastern Arabian Religion, Ethnicity, Language, and Culture

Alongside Greek or Hellenized soldiers, merchants, and administrators, a local Semitic population is evident in Bahrain and nearby Tarut. This is shown by Semitic names written in Greek script on funerary stele, including one with a date of 195 (117–118 BC) (Gatier et al. 2002; Potts 1990, 51–53). The choice of Greek lettering may indicate a desire to demonstrate involvement in the cosmopolitan Hellenized world. The skeletal remains from the collective tomb at Dibba, which was full of trade goods from the Roman world, showed evidence of female tooth-filing, a practice of pre-Islamic Arabia, implying a local population that had acquired Graeco-Roman tastes in consumption (Kutterer and Uerpmann 2010, 183–184).

The inland areas and coastal mainland retained a distinctively Arabian heritage. In the Eastern Province (Thaj and Al-Hasa areas, extending to the coast, including Ain Jawan) around forty funerary inscriptions indicate a Hasaitic ethnolinguistic milieu during the last three centuries BC. Additionally, Aramaic was used as a language of trade and prestige in the Oman Peninsula until at least the third century AD according to inscriptions from Mleiha and Ed-Dur, and perhaps also in the Eastern Province, depending on whether one ascribes some of the Abi'el coinage to that area (Multhoff and Stein 2018, 58; Mouton et al. 2012, 216).

Eastern Arabian religious practices are demonstrated by a small, square 8 × 8 m temple at Ed-Dur, of the first century BC/first century AD. Outside were found altars, a well, and evidence for ritual activities. An Aramaic inscription found nearby indicates that it was a temple to Shamash, as does a damaged statue of an eagle found inside; other eagle statues discovered nearby (Area F) find comparisons in distant Hatra, which like eastern Arabia was a focus of worship of Shamash. The architecture and religious behavior, including the setting up of *baetyl* stones inside and outside the temple around one of the external structures, invite parallels with the rituals of pre-Islamic Arabs recounted by Ibn al-Kalbi. No Hellenistic or Roman architectural traits were evident (Haerinck 2012; 2011; Potts 1990, 281–282).

Local coinage shows a melding of Greek and Arabian traditions. Initially it closely mirrored Alexander's tetradrachms, with his head on the obverse and Zeus holding an eagle on the reverse, but augmenting it with the name Shams (i.e., Shamash), later reduced to the first letter of his name (Robin 2016; Macdonald 2010. Robin's Types 1–3 and many of Type 6, the Abi'el coins, show the male with the eagle). Shamash/Shams was not the only Arabian god worshipped in the area. Wadd appears on pot sherds inscribed with South Arabian/Hasaitic at Mleiha, and Qala'at al-Bahrain ("Wadd is father"), and on at least three Hasaitic carved blocks from Thaj and its vicinity. Wadd was originally a god of South Arabia, and his cult is assumed to have traveled along caravan routes to the east via Qaryat Al-Faw. Also important was the

goddess Lāt, mentioned on two metal votive inscriptions from Mleiha, one in Aramaic and the other in Hasaitic *zabur* (minuscule) (Lombard and Kervran 1993, 135; Mouton 1997, 300–301. Stein n.d.; 2017).

Burial Traditions

Cist and mound burials can be seen throughout the central Gulf region, with some local variation, while a different tradition pertained in the lower Gulf.

Excavated graves at Thaj reveal box-like cists built of stone slabs, dug into the ground surface and beneath low mounds. They include the very rich elite female burial mentioned above. The Hasaitic inscriptions in the area are funerary dedications, but so far only one has been reported in direct association with a burial mound; instead, they are found built into walls or wells as spolia, or in a low-lying area to the north of the mound fields (Potts 1990, 37, 73). At Ayn Jawan (Ras Tanura), cist burials beneath mounds were also found around the settlement, as well as the chambered multiple grave of the first–second centuries ad (Potts 1993a; al-Saud 2010).

At first glance, the single Tylos period cist graves of Bahrain are somewhat different, being grouped into clusters beneath large, low mounds, some attaining considerable size (e.g., Shakhoura Mound 1, containing nearly 190 tombs, ca. 65 × 47 m across and 2.79 m high). New graves were added to the outside edge of the mound, and the earth piled over the cist contributed to the overall mound; some mounds were capped with stones, creating a kind of glacis. The graves themselves are single graves, sometimes plastered, and some containing wooden coffins. Tombs with multiple chambers and burials were introduced during Andersen's Phase IV (ad 150–450). Although monumental or elite graves are not noted, unlike elsewhere, the clustering around a central founder grave implies an ideology of kinship.

Anthropomorphic funerary stele were located in groups around the outskirts of the mounds (perhaps moved and grouped as the mound expanded over generations). Two from Bahrain and one from Tarut bear inscriptions in Greek lettering, while several from Shakhoura, Al-Maqsha, and gardens next to Qala'at al-Bahrain show broadly Hellenistic styles of depiction and dress. Dating is problematic, and a range of styles (and likely dates) is presented. Potts highlights three examples where elements of possible Christian iconography are depicted (grape cluster, dove, stole over the left shoulder) but determines that the evidence is inconclusive (Salman and Andersen 2009, 171–173; Andersen 2007, 239; Potts 2008; Gatier et al. 2002).

Other mounded cist graves are reported from Qatar, where extensive mound fields are located in the north and center of the peninsula, most notably including Umm al-Ma', Lisha, Mezru'ah, and Kharsaah. The graves are sometimes clustered into small aggregations within the mound fields. Dating for some in the Hellenistic to Roman/Parthian periods is indicated by pottery, glass, and a Roman sword scabbard, but uncertain for the majority of mounds; radiocarbon data are forthcoming from the *Human Populations and Demographics of Qatar* project. The graves are somewhat different in construction from those of Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, with oval cists cut into the soft bedrock and circular stone cairns above. Some excavated examples show a paved surface like the glacis seen in the Tylos burials. Settlement remains of the Hellenistic period are sparse in Qatar, limited to a small site with scanty architectural remains at Ras Uwainat Ali; the pottery compares to Qala'at Al-Bahrain Va-b, and one sherd had a partial Greek inscription. The paucity of settlement remains may indicate a nomadic population, a theory that gains support from camel burials excavated at Mezru'ah and Kharsaah. Also notable are simple upright stones (*baetyls*) placed a short distance away from the western side of tombs at Umm Al-Ma', perhaps analogous to the

anthropomorphic grave markers of Bahrain (Sakal et al. 2022; Bibby et al. 2017, 69; Cuttler et al. 2013; Kjaerum et al. 2017; Konishi 1994; Muhle and Schreiber 2012; Schreiber et al. 2009, 30–31, 66, plate 33).

A different or additional burial tradition is evident in the Oman Peninsula, where clusters of simple rectangular cist graves in mud brick (at Mleiha) and stone (Ed-Dur) were grouped around elite tower tombs. No gravestones or stele are reported in association with the ordinary tombs, and no mounds or cairns (Haerinck 2001, 7). A minority at Ed-Dur had entries or entrance passages, implying collective burial for some families.

Both Ed-Dur and Mleiha have large elite tombs with above-ground superstructures (fig. 49. 4). At Mleiha, subterranean chambers were built beneath towers with crenelated tops and square or rectangular ground plans. These would have broadly resembled Nabataean tower or cubical tombs at Meda'in Saleh and Petra. Similar eroded solid mud-brick examples are present at Qaryat Al-Faw, and generic similarities are noted with the tower tombs of Palmyra and Dura Europus. The PIR.A examples from Mleiha would be among the earliest, if not the earliest, of this style of tomb (Boucharlat and Mouton 1998). A similar example was found at Ed-Dur (Tomb 19, Area N, Type J), with a rich inventory and large square foundations to support a superstructure with crenelations, though this lacked any subterranean chamber. At least two other tombs at Ed-Dur had large subterranean chambers with vaulted roofs that extended above ground (Type I). One of these (G 5156, Area AV) held the bones of at least twenty-seven individuals and a rich collection of finds (Haerinck 2001, 7–14, 29–32, 41–47).

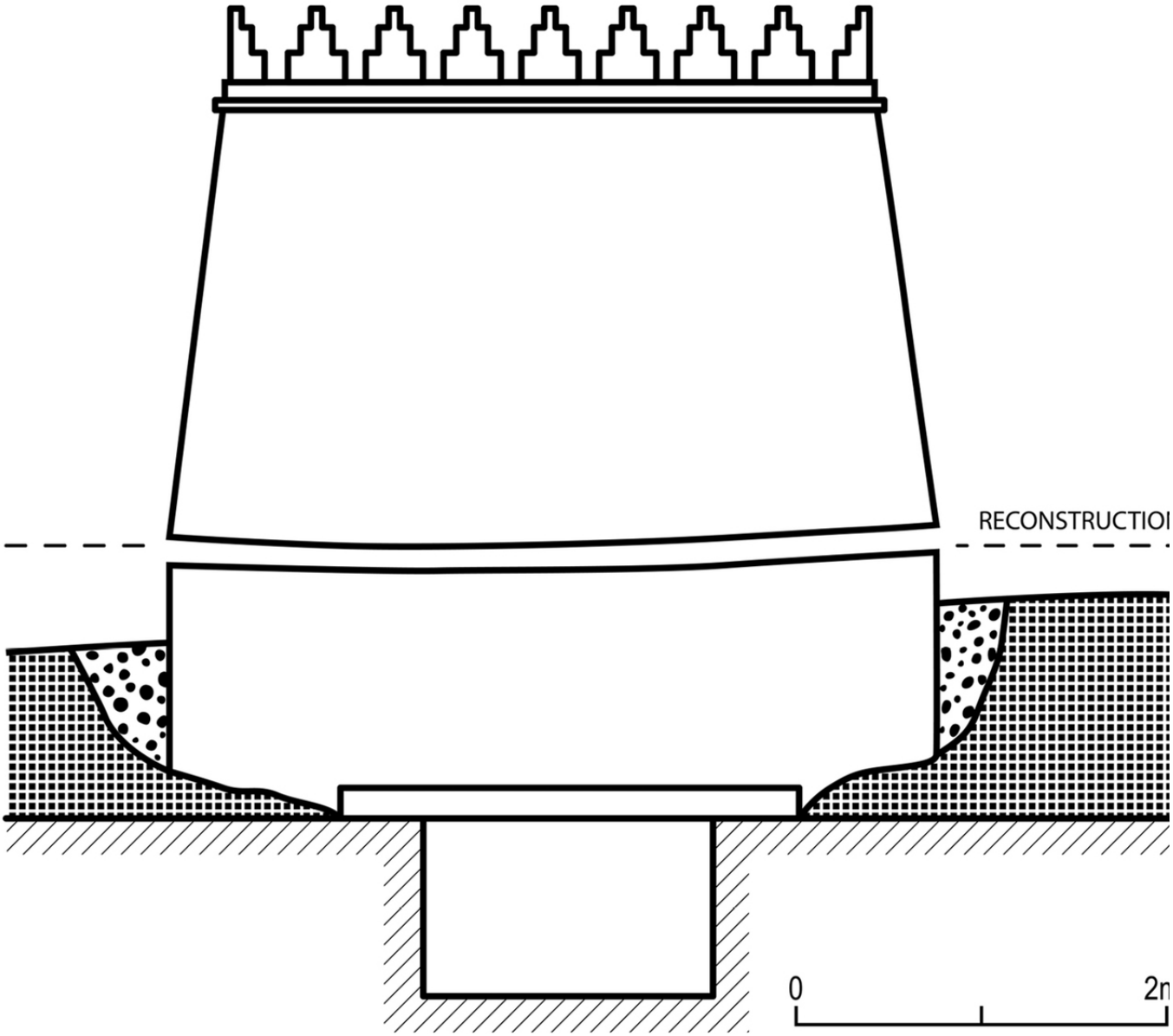


FIGURE 49.4. Reconstruction of an elite PIR.A-B tomb from Mleiha (redrawn by J. Bastek from Overlaet and Haerinck 2014, fig. 4).

Large elite tombs with above-ground superstructures are not yet reported from the PIR.D or later. Simple cist burials continued to be used, and elite warrior burials with camels and horses began to appear in the late first or second century ad (Lecomte et al. 1993, 195–196; Haerinck 2001, 49; Madsen et al. 2017, 60–61, 64–66; Andersen 2007, 67–68; Jasim 1999, 98–99). At Mezru'ah and Kharsaah, Qatar, the latter were covered by mounds, but this does not appear to be the case at Ed-Dur (Areas F and AV) and Mleiha (Sector BS, where there were twelve, two also containing horses). At Mleiha a second-to third-century ad date is suggested by extremely rich horse trappings with repoussé gold discs. This new tradition of elite burial in eastern Arabia, emerging between the first and third centuries ad, may relate to Arab movement into eastern Arabia. The latter possibility is supported by records of camel burial sacrifice by pre-Islamic Arabs, and by Ptolemy's listing of identifiably Arab tribal names for the area, which had not been mentioned by Strabo and Pliny (Sakal et al. 2022; Hoyland 2001, 26; Potts 1990, 222; Uerpmann 1999; Mouton 2010, 187–188, fig. 5; Kennet 2005, 115; King 2009).

Political Organization

A strong emphasis on lineage groups, indicative of a segmentary society, is evident across the region. This is best demonstrated by the organization of the clustered graves in Bahrain, Ed-Dur, and Mleiha; and by the evidence for lineage-based organization in the Hasaitic inscriptions, which in the Eastern Province (but not in the smaller corpus of Mleiha) specify the ʾl (family) of the deceased. Potts counts eleven such lineages, with seven of them attested only once (Potts 1990, 74–81).

The Bahraini tombs hint at a relatively egalitarian society on that island (Salman and Anderse n 2009, 179), but a more hierarchical organization of society is evident in the funerary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence for the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and the lower Gulf. The elite tombs elsewhere have already been mentioned, while clear evidence for monarchy is found in the epigraphic data for the Eastern Province and Mleiha. One Mleiha inscription refers to an individual, Dhariyyat, as "servant of the kings." Kingship is likewise attested on an early third-century bc bilingual Hasaitic-Aramaic tomb inscription of ʿAmud in Mleiha, described as *bqr* (likely "inspector") of the king of Oman (Potts 1990, 76–77; Stein n.d.; Overlaet et al. 2016).

The eastern Arabian "Abi'el coinage" (third century bc to the second century ad) also indicates the existence of monarchy, using Aramaic to identify at least four queens named Abi'el, daughters of Našil, Ma'šamaš, Labiš, and Baglan, respectively. Matrilineal genealogies are sometimes found in the Hasaitic funerary inscriptions, and there are well-known older and later precedents for female rulers in northern Arabia (Robin 2016; Macdonald 2010, 405, 412–414, 438). Monarchy is further attested by coins from the Eastern Province that name Abiyatha (third century bc?) and "Harithat King of Hagar" (second century bc?) using Hasaitic. Both are thought to be kings of Gerrha.

In contrast, Bahrain may have been under direct control of the Seleucids until the late second century bc, when it was then ruled by a Characene governor. Critical evidence is provided in the temple dedication by Kephisodoros, *strategos* of Tylos and the Islands, in the name of King Hyspaosines of Charax. Hyspaosines obtained independence from the Seleucids in the 130s or 120s bc and may have taken control of an existing Seleucid province in Bahrain. Kosmin contrasts this *strategos* with his eventual successor "Yarhai, satrap of the Thilouanoi" for King Meredat of Charax, known from a second-century ad Palmyrene inscription. Kosmin also posits a Seleucid and then Characene station "headed by an imperial official and staffed by a colonial population of Greeks, Babylonians and perhaps native Tylians" (Kosmin 2013, 65).

A second-century ad extension of Characene power into the lower Gulf may have occurred under King Meredat. Late Characene coinage of ad 142, indicates that he styled himself "king of the Omanites" or "king of Oman" (Potts 1988, 149–152).

Disengagement and Decline: The Sasanian Period

Kennet outlines the evidence for "a very dramatic decline in burials, rural settlement, coin deposition and urbanisation" throughout eastern Arabia, beginning in the second century AD and reaching its nadir by the fourth century AD. He attributes this to a drop in both population and economic activity (Kennet 2007, 106). Two stages can be discerned in the process of decline, the first occurring between the end of the first and the mid-second centuries AD with the abandonment of major sites in the northern and central Gulf (Failaka, Thaj) and the contraction of settlement at sites in the lower Gulf at the start of the PIR.D. The evidence from

Bahrain shows that western trade terminated there at around this time, though connections with the Roman world persisted in Mleiha as late as the mid-third century AD. Several authors note that settlement remains are characterized by fortifications at this time, indicative of instability or perhaps the arrival of Arab tribal elites (Kennet 2005, 115).

A second change occurs in the mid-third century ad, when the remaining major sites in eastern Arabia were abandoned (Mleiha, Ed Dur), and clear signs of Sasanian-period occupation are restricted to Bahrain (perhaps at a reduced level), and the northern Emirates (Kush, Khatt, Jazirat Ghanam, all UAE). This archaeological evidence for depopulation undermines a persistent historical narrative of intensive Sasanian investment in the Oman Peninsula, with an inferred high population (Kennet 2007, 107–108; Munt 2017, 265–266).

Regarding the nature and scale of occupation at the northern Sasanian-period sites, Kush is a relatively large, high mound, up to 120 m across, with a small, heavily fortified tower (Period II) dating to the very late Sasanian or very early Islamic period. The earliest excavated levels dated to the fifth–sixth centuries ad. At Khatt the size of the site could not be determined but 3.5 m of deposits were identified, and its occupation was dated to the fourth–fifth centuries. The small unexcavated site of Jazirat Al-Ghanam, just off the Musandam Peninsula of northern Oman, is interpreted as a Sasanian military outpost and has been assigned to the fourth century ad (De Cardi et al. 1994; Kennet 2005; Mouton and Cuny 2012, 180–181).

In Bahrain the evidence is limited to a handful of Fine Orange Painted Ware sherds in mixed deposits at Qala'at al-Bahrain, with no identified structures, and tombs of Andersen's Phase IV and V. Dateable tombs fall off in numbers during Phase V (mid-fifth to seventh centuries), perhaps as "a result of a larger part of the population adopting the Christian faith with a more modest burial tradition and an abandonment of earlier pagan cemeteries" (Kennet 2007, 105; Højlund and Andersen 1997, 214–215; Andersen 2007, 242–243; Salman and Andersen 2009, 122).

Explanations for the regional decline have touched on environmental factors (exploration of which is hampered by limited palaeoclimatic data) and a disruption in Roman trade in the Indian Ocean region during the third century ad, though this appears to have been reversed elsewhere by the mid-fourth century ad (e.g., Kennet 2007, 108–110; Power 2012, 51–52). A switch to nomadism might also account for the decline of sedentary occupation, perhaps linked to Arab migrations and/or environmental change. More data are required.

Following the Sasanian-period decline, the regional population did not recover significantly until the late seventh and eighth centuries ad, when there is abundant archaeological evidence for a Christian presence. The records of the Church of the East indicate the existence of Christian communities before this time, but they remain archaeologically elusive (Carter 2013).

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CHAPTER 50

ARABIA FROM THE HELLENISTIC TO THE LATE ROMAN/BYZANTINE PERIOD

*STEPHAN G. SCHMID AND ZBIGNIEW T. FIEMA

Nabataean Arabia

From their first mention in historic records in the late 4th c. bc until the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom by Rome in ad 106, a group of people called Nabataeans can be considered the most prominent political and cultural factor in that part of the Arabian Peninsula under consideration in this chapter.

Problems of Definition

No matter whether one starts with the historical, religious, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic aspects of the Nabataeans (Wenning 1987; Hackl, Jenni, and Schneider 2003; Schmid 2008 and 2001; Healey 2001; Wenning 2010), a definition of "Nabataean Arabia" poses difficulties. As compared with the subsequent Provincia Arabia formed in AD 106 after the Roman annexation of the Nabataean territory, there seems to have been no unity, other than the political one, before that date. The maps that aim to define the maximum extent of the Nabataean kingdom (fig. 50.1) produce a misleading idea of secure knowledge, although they offer only a very approximate impression.

FIGURE 50.1. Approximate extension of the Nabataean kingdom with key sites. Ancient/modern name: AYLA/ʿAqaba, HAWARA/Humayma, HEGRA/Madain Salih, GAZA/Ghazza, GERASA/Jerash, MADABA/Madaba, PALMYRA/Tadmor, SCYTHOPOLIS/Beith She'an, TAYMA/Taima (David Israel).

The problem rests in the necessary simplifications: locations and regions thought to have been within the Nabataean kingdom, but not necessarily at the same time, are illustrated together with areas for which we have only historical information but no material culture, or vice versa. The following example will suffice to demonstrate the apparent difficulties. Since the historical sources (Josephus, *Ant. Iud.* 13.387–392 [13.15.1–2]; *BI* 1.99–103 [1.4.7–8]) indicate that after the death of the Seleucid Antiochos XII in 84 BC, Damascus came under Nabataean rule for some years, and with the general agreement that specific coins depicting the Nabataean king Aretas III and a Greek legend were struck at the mint of Damascus (see Barkay 2019 on Nabataean coins), the extension of the Nabataean kingdom consequently includes that city. Yet, no single element representing the Nabataean material culture has been found so far in Damascus or the surrounding area. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain a concise picture as to the extent of direct Nabataean control and presence there.

Elements of History

While "Arabs," without further specification, are mentioned in earlier texts, the first appearance of the Nabataeans as such occurs in a Greek historical source written by Diodorus, on the authority of Hieronymus of Cardia (ca. 360–ca. 270 BC), and dealing with events of 311 BC (19.94.1–100.3; Hackl et al. 2003). The text focuses on the struggle between the diadochs, especially between Ptolemaios and the Antigonids. When the Antigonids occupied Phoenicia, they came into hostile contact with the Nabataean Arabs. Diodorus considers the Nabataean homeland during that time to be located somewhere south of the Dead Sea, with a high and easily defendable rock (πέτρα) as a stronghold where they hid their wealth accumulated through their trade involving incense, myrrh, and other goods coming from south Arabia. Diodorus mentions that the Nabataeans wrote in "Syrian letters," which is usually interpreted as meaning they used Aramaic for international diplomatic purposes, despite the fact that they spoke Arabic. In further passages, Diodorus depicts the Nabataeans as pastoral nomads without permanent settlements. On the one hand, the general attitude of the Greek writer(s) toward people cultivating other forms of living as well as the specific wording used by Diodorus/Hieronymus do reflect well-known literary topoi. On the other, recent archaeological investigations indicate the existence of built structures in the central parts of Petra going back to the early Hellenistic period (Renel and Mouton 2013; Graf 2013). This could further find confirmation in references to a *city* called Petra, found in the *Geography* of Eratosthenes of Cyrene (third century BC), quoted, however, only later in Strabo's *Geography* (16.4.2 [C 767]), as well as in an inscription from Priene (shortly after 129 BC; see Hackl et al. 2003, 27–31, 126–127), indicating the extent of Nabataean commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, there is no convincing archaeological evidence that in the area between the Dead and the Red Seas, formal settlements of considerable size were built before the late second/early first century BC. Whether this is due to the massive building programs in later periods, or reflects the reality of archaeological investigation is difficult to determine. So far everything indicates that the Nabataeans were indeed to a large extent not permanently settled at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. What is clear, however, is that during that time they continued to extend direct control over the territories reaching as far as the Hawran in the north, hence the reported clashes with the Seleucids, and as far as Gaza in the west, where they came into conflict with the Hasmoneans (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 13.360 [13.13.3], ca. 100 BC; cf. Hackl et al. 2003, 469–470). Shortly before the mid-first century BC, the Nabataean king Aretas III, reportedly in friendly relations with Antipatros, the father of Herod the Great, assisted Hasmonean Hyrkanos in reestablishing his rule, and he even—unsuccessfully—laid siege to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Jos., *Ant. Iud.* 14.8–19 [14.1.3–2.1]; *BI* 1.123–126). This and

other passages indicate that the (political) center of the Nabataean kingdom of the mid-first century bc was the *city* of Petra, the same general geographic area where Diodorus/Hieronymus had localized the Nabataeans for 311 bc. Here, as well as in the case of Damascus, the nature and structure of Nabataean rule is revealed. Thanks to their military supremacy and/or through taking advantage of political constellations, they were able to take control of urbanized territories that definitely did not belong to their initial sphere of influence. Hence, such areas might (temporarily) be considered as "Nabataean" in terms of *political* control, but they continued to belong to their own respective *cultural* entities.

With the continuing interventions and then the established presence of Rome in Near Eastern affairs, and in the absence of Nabataean historiography, Graeco-Roman writers describing the period from the second quarter of the first century bc onward had to increasingly deal with the Nabataeans. Main authors such as Strabo, Flavius Josephus, Pliny the Younger, and others recognize the Nabataeans as a supraregional power, frequently involved in territorial quarrels with the last Seleucids, the Ptolemies, the Hasmoneans, and later Herod the Great and his successors. Therefore, their area of (direct) action and control did comprise parts of the Sinai, the Gulf of Aqaba and stretches along the Red Sea, the Negev, all of Transjordan, and southern Syria. Furthermore, the descriptions of Petra, especially in Strabo's *Geography* (16.4.21 [C 779]), on the authority of Athenodorus of Tarsus, reveal the image of a well-organized and cosmopolitan city, no longer resembling the rock of 311 bc, used as refuge by pastoral nomads. At the same time, the range of Nabataean commercial interests increased since ancient texts and inscriptions indicate their presence in Italy (Puteoli and Rome) over longer periods of time. Inscriptions as well as material culture confirm that by the end of the first century bc, the Nabataeans had established other (secondary) central places beside Petra, such as Bostra in southern Syria, Mampsis and Oboda in the Negev, as well as important oasis settlements along the trade routes of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) and Dumat al-Jandal (al-Jawf). The Roman attitude toward the Nabataeans, from the time of Pompey the Great onward, clearly demonstrates that the Nabataeans were considered on the same level as other kingdoms ("client kingdoms") on the periphery of the Roman direct sphere of influence. The Nabataeans actively participated in these relations, when sending envoys to Rome to plea their cause with the Roman rulers. Nevertheless, they had also maintained a rather self-confident policy, leading to conflicts, not only with the Herodians but also with the Romans, especially when the latter attempted to extend their control into the Arabian Peninsula, as with the expedition of Aelius Gallus to Arabia Felix in 26/25 bc (Arbach and Schiettecatte 2017; Wiegels 2015).

When the Nabataeans are compared with the Seleucid, Ptolemaic, and Judaean kingdoms, it is remarkable that they managed to maintain their sovereignty until ad 106. What exactly led to the Roman takeover under Trajan is not clear, but the Roman annexation should probably be understood in the wider frame of the conflict between the superpowers—Rome and Parthia. Considering the seeming unreliability of the Nabataeans, and their conflicting commercial interests, Trajan's decision may have been largely influenced by the forthcoming war with Parthia (see Speidel 2019; 2016; Nappo 2015).

Society and Material Culture

Although we do have historical mentions of the Nabataeans from the late fourth century BC onward and while the earliest archaeological evidence from Petra dates to approximately the same period, it is more difficult to identify a specific *Nabataean* material culture for this early stage. Recent studies do suggest a rather early beginning of Nabataean coin minting, but this would have been more an expression of economic policies and political necessity than of

material culture, supported by the somewhat mediocre aspect of these coins (most recently Barkay 2019, although her consideration of third-century BC Petra as a "large city" [p. 11] is debatable). So far, settlements that can be called genuinely Nabataean in southern Jordan, the Negev, or the Ḥijāz, show only scanty evidence datable to the period prior to the later second century BC. Other parts of the Nabataean kingdom present a different picture, including a manifest tradition of sedentary life with all aspects of material culture present, but settlements such as Damascus, Philadelphia, or Madaba can hardly be called genuinely Nabataean.

The situation does improve from the later second century bc onward, when some specific elements of a typical Nabataean material culture can be identified. Again, detailed analyses indicate that there was no homogeneous Nabataean culture all over the kingdom. Only in Petra can we witness all elements of Nabataean culture, e.g., the characteristic rock-cut tomb façades, free-standing temples, sculptural decoration of public buildings. The occurrence of these elements within the Nabataean kingdom is both uneven and selective. While in Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) Nabataean rock-cut tomb façades do occur (Nehmé 2015), they are not found at any other place, except for al-Bad' in the Midian. Possibly, this could be explained by geological factors, but there are also notable differences between tombs in Petra and Hegra: the architectural elements clearly featuring Mediterranean (e.g., Greek and Roman) influence on the façades are restricted to Petra (fig. 50.2; McKenzie 1990).

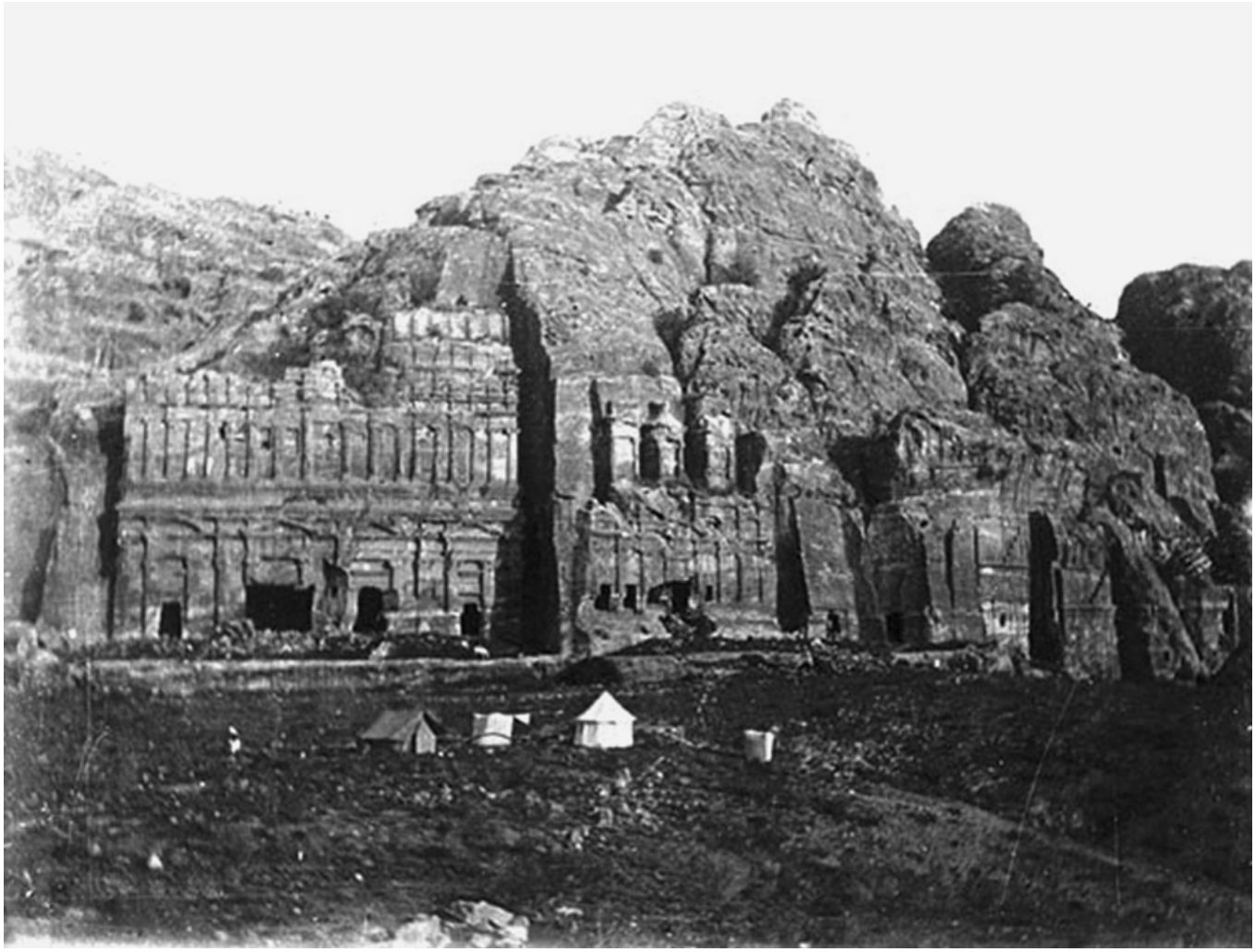
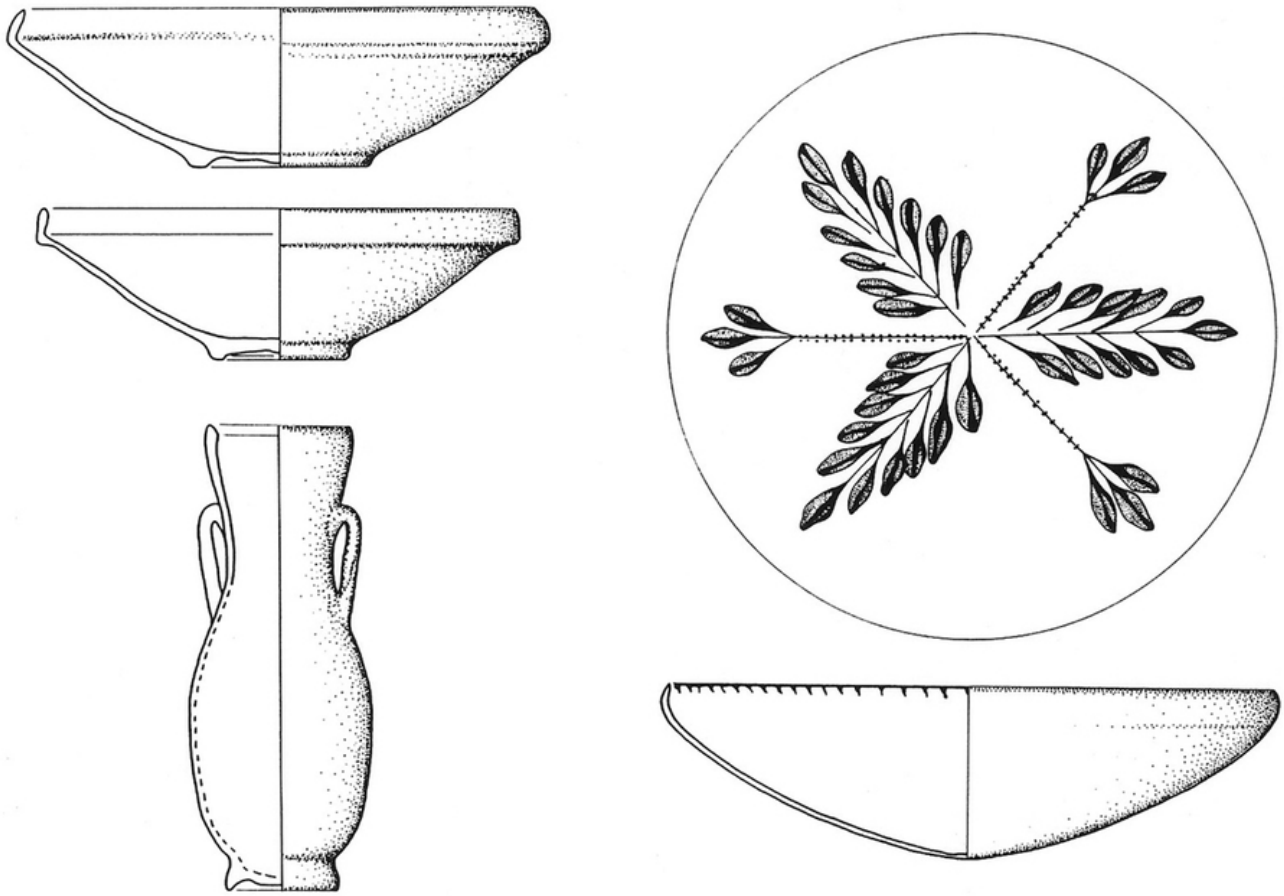


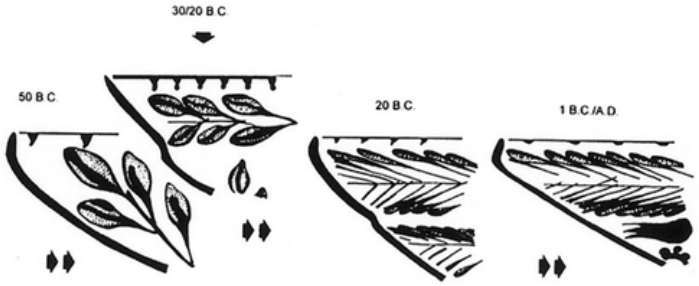
FIGURE 50.2. Petra, the "Urn Tomb," left, and the "Corinthian Tomb," *center*, photograph from 1899 by Gertrude Bell (Newcastle University, Gertrude Bell Archive, A 493).

No matter whether this indicates social, economic, religious, or other differences, it points to a multifaceted society within the Nabataean kingdom. The same is true when other areas are compared—for instance, the northern parts of the kingdom, with its nucleus in and around Petra.

Historical sources as well as Nabataean inscriptions indicate the presence of groups considering themselves Nabataeans in the Hawran, or as belonging to a social superstructure called Nabataeans. Sources also attest that the region belonged to the Nabataean kingdom during some parts of the first centuries bc and ad (Wenning 1987, 40–51; 2007, 36–38; cf. Nehmé 2010; Hackl et al. 2003, 165–166, 181–200; on the volatile political history, cf. Engels 2007). This region displays a rather rich assemblage of large sanctuaries and sculpture, chronologically belonging to the pre-provincial period (Weber 2010; 2009). However, there are clear stylistic differences and regional particularities in a comparison of the sculpture from the Hawran with that from the Petra region, so that a preferable term is "Hauranite sculpture" rather than "Nabataean sculpture," as the latter would evoke a non-existent homogeneity (Wenning 2001, 312). What can further be observed is a certain cultural (and epigraphic) difference between the (political) Herodian north and the (political) Nabataean south of the Hawran (Kropp 2013, 43–47), with the exception of the sanctuary at Sî (Tholbecq 2007). Significant differences in terms of sculpted and architectural decoration between the (Nabataean) Hawran and (Nabataean) southern Jordan on the one hand, and the (Nabataean) Ḥijāz on the other hand indicate the existence of a rather complex cultural, social, and political construct.

A notable exception to this cultural particularism or regionalism seems to be the typically painted, thin-walled Nabataean pottery (figs. 50.3, 50.4).

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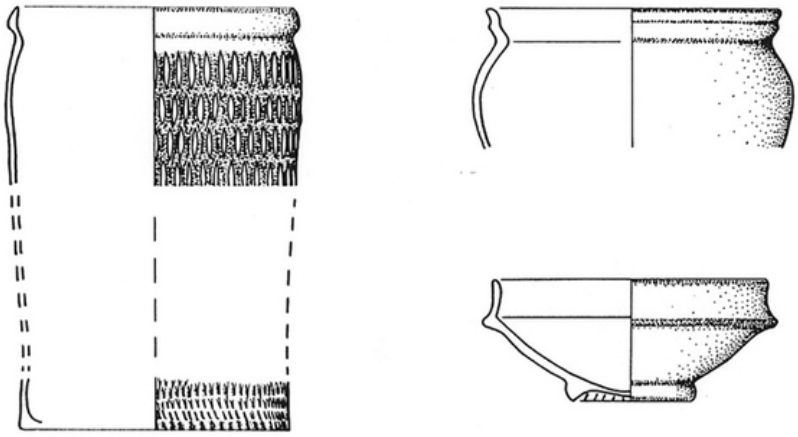
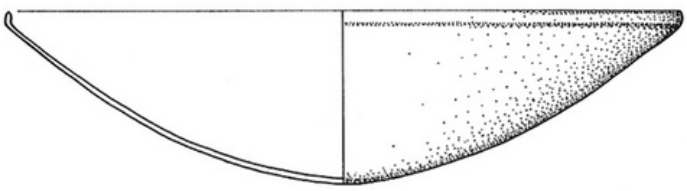


FIGURE 50.3. Nabataean plain and painted pottery, c. 50 **BC**–c. **AD** 20 (Schmid).



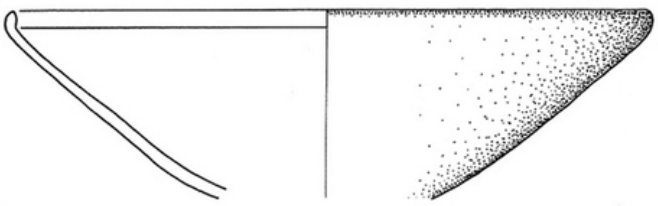


FIGURE 50.4. Nabataean painted pottery, last quarter of the first century **AD** (*top*)—fourth century **AD** (*bottom)* (Schmid).

The earliest examples appear in the later second or early first century BC and are found in substantial quantities from the later first century BC until the Roman annexation, all over the Nabataean kingdom. They are also found, though in smaller quantities, along the important trade routes on the Arabian Peninsula, including Gaza, Thâj, Marib, Qana, Khor Rori, al-Qusayr, and even the Farasan islands, as well as locations on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea (Schmid 2000, 127–131). Everything indicates that the painted pottery was produced exclusively in the Petra area and exported from there, while plain fine wares and coarse wares were produced locally at various places within the kingdom. Clearly, painted pottery cannot be considered a luxury item. As in all other periods of antiquity, decorated pottery should be considered as reflecting and imitating vessels made from "nobler" materials, mostly (precious) metals. Further, since at least 75 percent of painted Nabataean pottery is represented by open, mostly flat shapes, such as bowls and cups, it clearly was not appreciated for its content, contrary to some closed forms, such as amphorae.

Hence, one has to look for a specific reason explaining the peculiar distribution pattern of Nabataean painted pottery. The best explanation would link the importance of these painted bowls to their function—the drinking of wine (for the following, see Schmid 2021, including full bibliography). Clearly, the built and rock-cut architecture of the Nabataeans as well as historical sources strongly emphasize banqueting as an important activity within the Nabataean kingdom. Since the simple consumption of wine does not require specific vessels, the fact that it was apparently important to drink from specific painted bowls *everywhere within the Nabataean kingdom* indicates that the crucial element was the *act* related to a specific form of banqueting. It can therefore be concluded that drinking wine from specific bowls was a part of identity-building processes within the Nabataean kingdom. According to current theories, social groups define themselves either by common elements and/or by elements distinguishing them from other groups. For example, from the 1960s onward, painted bowls were found in Jerusalem and at other Herodian sites, showing decorative elements similar to those on the Nabataean bowls but clearly originating from other workshops. Referred to as "Pseudo-Nabataean Ware," "Jerusalem," or "Jerusalemite bowls," respectively, this characteristic pottery seems to occur mainly at Herodian sites and spans the period from the second half of Herod's reign to the period of his successors. Scientific analyses showed that all of these bowls were produced centrally in Jerusalem. Although the "Jerusalemite bowls" are far less numerous and were in use for a shorter period of time than the Nabataean painted bowls, the phenomenology is comparable. In both cases, a centrally produced type of drinking bowl is distributed over key sites of the kingdom. The vessels are similar but distinct enough not to be confused. Interestingly, in Oboda and in Masada, Nabataean painted bowls are found in the same general contexts as "Jerusalemite bowls." Therefore, there was no practical obstacle for using Nabataean painted pottery at Herodian sites but obviously a deliberate choice not to do so, most probably in order to signal the respective belonging to different identity-systems.

The painted pottery goes beyond simple competition because it reflects a kind of (sub)-institutional system of commensal policy with the goal of creating and strengthening a common identity (that may very well go along with different other identities—for example, in religious or linguistic matters). Hence, we may conclude that the significant social "glue" within the Nabataean kingdom was feasting, and more specifically, the drinking of wine. This is further confirmed by ancient texts revealing that the Nabataeans regularly held banquets with thirteen participants and two female singers and that the king held many banquets in a huge hall, with

no one drinking more than eleven cupfuls, each time using a different golden cup (Str., *Geog.* 16.4.26). Such banquets at the royal court were not only the perfect tool for fostering group identity, but they also offered the continuous occasion to define and, if necessary, modify the position of each participant in their social network(s).

The appearance of the "Jerusalemite bowls" falls within a period of augmented competition and conflicts between the Nabataeans and the Herodians. Besides these, one also encounters a kind of rivalry in the matter of building activities. While Herod developed lavish building programs in a frenetic rhythm all over his kingdom and beyond, the Nabataeans placed their emphasis on the development of Petra, that saw major building phases during this time, as a clear "response" to Herod's enterprises.

Returning to the social "tool," its use indicates that the Nabataeans were able to construct a kind of "unifying umbrella" over the ruled territory, even though it was very fragmented with regard to ethnicity, culture, languages, and religion. One realizes that indeed there are common elements within this territory, such as the religious architecture of the Nabataeans. While the specific design of temples and sanctuaries located in the north (Hawran), in the center (Moabitis to Petra), and in the south (as far as the Sinai) show quite some differences, they all include specific installations for banqueting, especially if they are not directly related to major settlements (fig. 50.5).

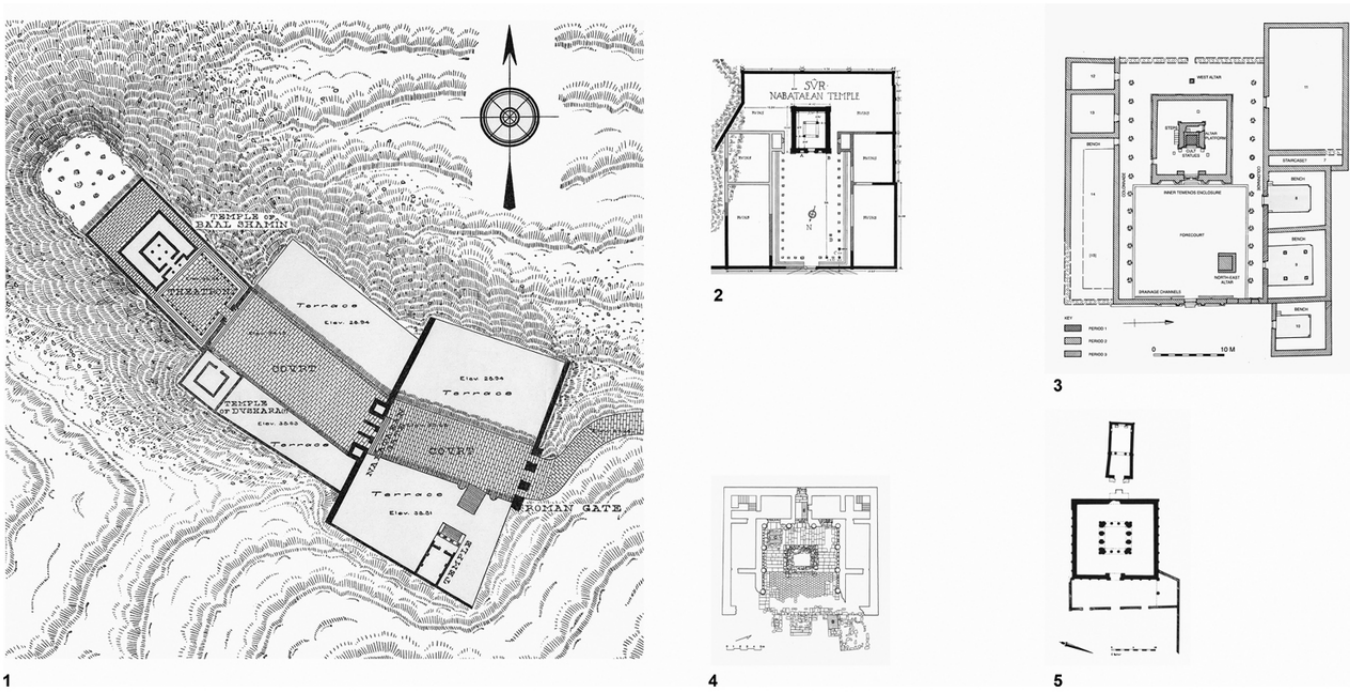


FIGURE 50.5. Nabataean sanctuaries and temples; 1. Sí; 2. Ṣūr al Lajā; 3. Khirbet et-Tannur; Wadi Rum/Iram; Qasr Get/Qasrawet (1: Butler 1916, before p. 365; 2: Schmid 2001, 378 fig. 11.8; 3: McKenzie et al. 2013, 138 fig. 233; 4: Tholbecq 1998, 242 fig. 1; 5: Schmid 2001, 378 fig. 11.8).

In sanctuaries such as the ones in Sí, Ṣūr al Lajā, Kh. et-Tannur (although its major building phase is from the second century AD: McKenzie et al. 2013), Wadi Rum, and Qasr Get, etc. we find the characteristic banqueting halls. One of the compulsory components of the funeral complexes of Petra are the banqueting halls, no matter whether they are rock-cut, free-standing, or open-air. The same is true for open-air sanctuaries, attested from the center of the kingdom around Petra to its eastern outposts in Hegra and Dûmat al-Jandal, and, last, for Nabataean houses (Kolb 2007; 2012). Moreover, analyses of Nabataean painted pottery are

likely to underline the central role of the area of Petra for the development of the Nabataean kingdom. Not only was the painted pottery centrally produced there, but it is also where it continued to be produced and used after the incorporation of the Nabataean kingdom into the Roman Empire. After the annexation, the distribution of that pottery shrinks to an area of about 100 km around Petra, while in the immediate vicinity of Petra it is still in use until the sixth century ad. Therefore, a Nabataean social stratum obviously continued to be present there, together with names such as Obodianos and Dusarios found within the Petra Papyri of the sixth century ad. Historical sources locating the Nabataeans in the area between the Dead and the Red Seas in the late fourth century bc, and reflections concerning the production and distribution of painted pottery underline the important role of Petra as a probable nucleus of the Nabataean kingdom, from its beginning to its end.

Not Only Incense …

Most ancient sources insist on the important role played by the incense trade between Nabataea and Arabia Felix for the economic wealth of the Nabataeans (f. ex. Diod., 19.94.5; cf. Schneider 2012; Durand 2012). This is certainly true and is reflected in the presence of Nabataeans along trading routes and in harbor sites, indicated by inscriptions and pottery. Similar to the Edomites before them, the Nabataeans took advantage of the fact that within their territory, the Incense Road and other routes of commercial transport crossed the so-called King's Highway, the most important north–south connection in the highlands, a valuable alternative to the coastal connection between Syria and Egypt. Like the Edomites, the Nabataeans expanded from an early stage into the Negev. From the second century BC onward, Nabataeans were present first in the Aegean and later in Italy, probably trying to extend direct control over the commerce in aromatics from Arabia and India. Such economic factors would contribute to the extension of direct Nabataean influence along important trade routes on the Arabian Peninsula. Besides spices from south Arabia and India, ancient sources mention "incredible numbers of cattle" as being one of the economic pillars of (early) Nabataean society (Diod. 3.43.4, referring to Agatharchides of Cnidus). Consequently, during their military clashes with the Nabataeans, the Antigonids specifically tried to take away the cattle as booty.

The area of the Dead Sea was well known for asphalt as well as for balsam growing nearby. Both products were important items of economic value, the asphalt being heavily disputed among the populations living around the Dead Sea (Diod. 2.48.6; 19.98–100). Another important natural resource within the core of the Nabataean kingdom was copper, with the mines of Faynan already exploited many centuries before the Nabataeans. To date, it is not clear if and to what extent the Nabataeans extracted and traded copper from Faynan. Experts propose that after the Edomite period technical difficulties downsized copper extraction at Faynan and, therefore, the Nabataeans were not active in copper production and trade (Haupt mann 2007, 155, *contra* Wenning 1987, 108–109). On the other hand, significant amounts of Nabataean pottery and coins (Kind et al. 2005, esp. 181 table 2 for coins) indicate a permanent and substantial Nabataean presence in Faynan that can hardly be explained with just controlling access to Petra alone (see Kennedy 2021, 130, 201, 212). While the painted pottery indicates that the Nabataeans were drinking wine, botanical remains from archaeological contexts (Jacquat and Martinoli 1999) as well as wine presses from the Beidha area (Salameen 2005) clearly confirm that the Nabataeans were also cultivating grapes. Probably, the produce was for their own use and not for export.

Political and Economic History

Neither the reasons nor the nature of the Roman annexation of Nabataea in AD 106 are fully understood (Cass. Dio 68.14.6; Fest. 14.3; Amm. Marc. 14.8.13) and the proposed hypotheses are not satisfactory. The Romans advertised the annexation only five years later and the early provincial coins feature the term *adquisita* rather than *capta* (Bowersock 1983, 81–85). Destructions reported in Petra and elsewhere may have resulted from military confrontation, yet the possibility of internal unrest caused by the invasion should not be overlooked. The collapse of Nabataean royal authority and influential social classes might have activated political upheaval and social disorder resulting in violent acts of dissatisfaction or revenge.

While some territories were added in the early third century, the entire Nabataean territory from Bostra in the north to Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in the south became *redacta in formam provinciae* (Gatier and Salles 1988, 184–185), including some Decapolis cities (Adraa, Philadelphia, Gerasa) (fig. 50.6).

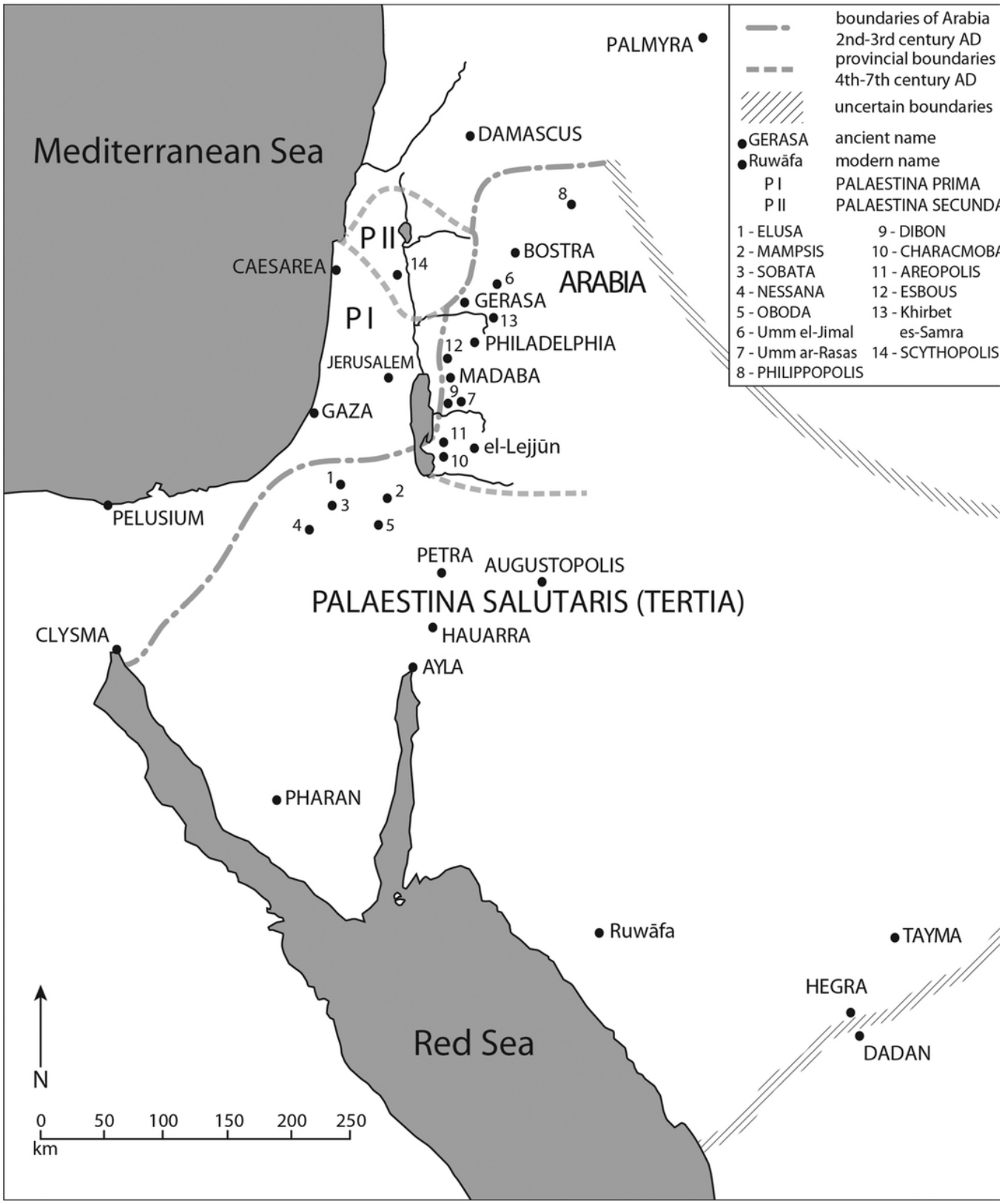


FIGURE 50.6. Roman Arabia and Byzantine Palaestina Tertia. Ancient/modern names: AREOPOLIS/er-Rabba, AUGUSTOPOLIS/Udhruh, AYLA/ʿAqaba, BOSTRA/Bosra, CHARACMOBA/al-Karak, DIBON/Dhiban, ELUSA/Halutza/Khalasa, ESBOUS/Tell Hesban, HAUARRA/Humayma, CLYSMA/Suez, HEGRA/Madain Salih, GAZA/Ghazza, GERASA/Jerash, MADABA/Madaba, MAMPSIS/Mamshit/Kurnub, NESSANA/Nitzana, OBODA/Avdat,

PHILIPPOPOLIS/Shahba, PALMYRA/Tadmor, SCYTHOPOLIS/Beith She'an, SOBATA/Shivta/Sbeita, TAYMA/Taima (David Israel).

The main component of the provincial garrison was Legio III Cyrenaica with its headquarters in Bostra. Military detachments were first based in population centers, such as Petra, Gerasa, Mampsis, Auarra, Hegra, and in the third–fourth centuries, in the frontier forts (Kennedy 2004).

The backbone of military, administrative, and civilian communication was *Via Nova Traiana*—a grand highway connecting the Red Sea with Syria (Graf 1995), built in 111–114, which also supported the incense trade. The Darb al-Bakra route, linking Hegra and Petra (al-Ghabban 2007), was also traveled after the annexation, and commercial contacts with the south probably continued at least till the early third century. However, the diminished demand for oriental goods and the changed patterns of trade routes in the later third century must have affected urban prosperity.

Resulting from the successive reorganizations between 295 and 390 (Sipilä 2009, 149–196; Di Segni 2018), Trajanic Arabia was halved, with the northern part retaining the name, with Bostra as its capital. The southern part became Palaestina Salutaris/Tertia, with Petra as its capital. While Trajanic Arabia ecclesiastically belonged to the Patriarchate of Antioch and was under the Metropolitan See of Bostra, after the Council of Chalcedon (451), Palaestina Salutaris/Tertia belonged to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with Petra as Metropolitan See.

Although the provincial and the military organization survived until the Muslim conquest, security concerns were increasingly reliant on alliances with the leaders (*phylarchoi*) of Arab confederations. In 530 or 531, Justinian granted the title of *king* to the Jafnid al-Ḥārith bin Jabala, with authority over Arabia (Procop., *Pers.* 1.17.45, 47), with his brother, Abū Karib, appointed as phylarch of Palaestina Tertia (Fiema and Nehmé 2015, 385–388). The vicissitudes of the Persian occupation of the Levant (613–629) are largely unknown for Arabia and Palaestina Tertia but the Byzantine recovery was short-lived. In 630, Aila (ʿAqaba) capitulated to the Muslim forces, and the battle near the Yarmouk River in 636 ended Byzantine rule over the Levant.

Petra and Bostra

The political and cultural landscape of the province was dominated by Petra and Bostra, their histories a virtual microcosm of the history of Roman Arabia, regrettably marred by modern misconceptions. Supposedly, Petra experienced a political-economic decline in the first century AD, so that King Rabbel II moved the capital to Bostra. Neither proposition is substantiated by historical and archaeological data (Fiema 2003, 39–43), yet the pre-eminence of Bostra is also, unjustifiably, proposed for the early provincial period. Already in 112, Petra was included in the road network of Roman Palestine, Bostra only in 114. The new chronological system—the Arabian provincial era (Freeman 1986)—is still associated with Bostra, resulting in the so-called Era of Bostra, clearly a misnomer.

The status designations and honorifics bestowed on these cities should reflect their relative importance. Those of Petra—*Augusta colonia Antoniniana nobilis ingenua mater coloniarum* (or *metrocolonia*) *Hadriana Petra Metropolis Arabiae*—predate the corresponding honorifics of Bostra and were still in use in the sixth century (Arjava et al. 2007, 69–70; P. Petra 23). Under Trajan, Petra became a metropolis of Arabia; it was granted the status of *colonia*, possibly by Caracalla, and *metrocolonia*—a rare honorific—in the third century. *Nova Traiana Bostra* is attested in 115–117, the city became *colonia* under Severus Alexander, and *metropolis* under Philip the Arab (Sartre 1985, 77; 1993, 76–78; Fiema 2003, 44–46).

Petra never became "Roman" in the strict sense; the Nabataean-Hellenistic architectural heritage was always prevalent. Yet, the post-106 building program in Petra reflects Roman

idealizations of civic life, including the formalization of the main, colonnaded street. Significant changes at the "Great Temple" complex turned it into a multifunctional civic/government complex, not unlike a Roman forum. Other constructions included the so-called Roman-Byzantine Baths, a monumental exedra adorned by imperial statues, and a temple to the imperial cult (e.g., Augé et al. 2014, 54–76).

The post-106 development of Bostra was no less impressive. The city featured an orthogonal plan, especially in the eastern part. As Bostra was refounded as *Nova Traiana Bostra*, the indelible elements of a Roman city are more accentuated than in Petra. Around the junction of the main streets, a complex of structures included a monumental exedra (pseudo-nymphaeum), the nymphaeum (pseudo-kalybe), and the South Baths, while the nearby Central Baths were modified. Additions in the second century included the legionary fortress, theater, amphitheater, and the hippodrome, but the formalization of the main colonnaded streets is dated only to the Severan period (Fournet et al. 2002).

From the third century, the fate of both cities is clearly separated. In Petra, disuse and abandonment are attested already in the late second century, indicating that the economic prosperity was no longer sustainable. Following the earthquake of 19 May 363, some destroyed public buildings were no longer restored, reflecting the urban stagnation and the growing insignificance. Religious conflicts affected Petra during the fourth–early fifth centuries (e.g., Euseb., *Comm. ad Isaiam* 2.23.9–14 [42.11–12], early fourth century; Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 7.15, ca. ad 385), and at the end of the fifth, the city became a place of banishment for ecclesiastics and criminals (Ioh. Mal. 16.5). Although the churches include a magnificently decorated basilica of St. Mary, these were often surrounded by ruins. The corpus of Greek papyri dated to 537–593, while confirming urban and administrative continuity, presents a highly selective image as seen from the perspective of prosperous landowners. The latest historical information dates to the end of the sixth century. Possibly, by the early eighth century, Petra ceased as an urban center, gradually disintegrating into clusters of habitations in the valley (Fiema 2002; 2015).

In contrast, Bostra enjoyed an architectural renaissance and relative prosperity in the fourth–sixth centuries. The Cathedral, the bishop's palace, the Church of St. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius, and the city porticoes were built or redecorated. The transformation of the porticoes into separate shops—as in a modern *souq*—began probably only in the seventh centuries. The Central and South Baths were abandoned, but industrial and artisan activities were pursued there in the Umayyad period. The city continued to be an important Muslim center. The occupational breakdown occurs only after the earthquake of 749 (Dentzer 2007, 49–76).

Cities and Countryside

Other cities in Arabia shared the prosperity of Petra and Bostra in the second century, as reflected in the quality of architecture and decoration. These changes, however, represent additions and embellishment rather than replanning. Decapolis cities, like Gerasa and Philadelphia, displayed urban design already developed in the Hellenistic period. Reflecting both aesthetics and practicality, the colonnaded streets dominated urban landscapes by emphasizing axiality and orthogonal plan, with temples, nymphaea, theaters, and *exedrae* located alongside. Some temples are of the first century AD, but others were either finished (the Artemision in Gerasa), or built (the Great Temple in Philadelphia) only in the second. Even smaller provincial centers, often of pre-Hellenistic origins, such as Esbous (Hesban), Dibon (Diban), Areopolis (el-Rabba), or Characmoba (al-Karak) boasted new buildings. The only true Roman city in Arabia was Philippopolis (Shahba), founded by Philip the Arab and never completed. Its plan features a classic quadrangle subdivided by two colonnaded streets into four quarters of *insulae*, with

the public structures—forum, theater, baths, the Philippeion, the palace—clustered around the center.

Rather than imposing an urbanistic blueprint, Roman domination secured favorable conditions for growth and prosperity. Thus, it became a catalyst through which the Hellenistic, Nabataean, Roman, and Near Eastern models of urbanism continued to influence each other, resulting in the formation of a distinct local architecture. Late antique cityscape shifts away from the Hellenistic-Roman archetypes, featuring spontaneous development, encroachment of private into public spaces, and slow disappearance of baths, theaters, and porticoes. That transformation, attested during the sixth-seventh centuries (Avni 2011, for discussion), promoted a practical approach and extreme pragmatism in solving urban problems. While often acclaimed as signifying economic revitalization, in some cases, like Petra, the transformation is associated with material and economic deterioration.

The ascendancy of Christianity is also reflected in the urban fabric of Arabia. Although actual destructions were few, the decrease of pagan festivals caused the gradual abandonment of temples. In some cases, the demise was ideologically reinforced. The Artemision in Gerasa, abandoned by the mid-fifth century, was left in ruins signifying the domination of Christianity (see Lichtenberger and Raja 2018, for current research). The pagan sanctuary at Jabal Haroun near Petra had been entirely incorporated into the monastic complex of St. Aaron, but the main cultic room was made inaccessible (Fiema et al. 2016). Construction of churches was a widespread phenomenon even during the seventh century in towns and villages (Michel 2001).

The countryside flourished in late antiquity due to the unparalleled expansion into marginal lands, extensive irrigation, and the economic symbiosis of farmers and nomadic herders. For example, villages in the region of Bostra, producing wine, fruit, and olives, although irregular in plan, featured large courtyard houses, cisterns, even baths and often several churches (e.g., eight in Khirbet es-Samra). Settlements on the fringes of cultivated land benefited from the Syria–Ḥijāz trade, e.g., Umm el Jimal (with fifteen churches) or Umm al Rasas (fourteen churches). Organic growth, extensive water conservation technologies, and impressive churches characterize small towns in the Negev, such as Elusa, Oboda, Mampsis, Nessana, and Rehovot. Their prosperity was based on state-provided security, wine production, town markets, and alliances with local nomadic tribes.

Continuity and Change

More than half a millennium had passed from the Roman annexation of Nabataea to the Muslim conquest of Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina Tertia—a period marked by both the survivals and cessations of traditional customs, religion, and languages. The outcome of the Roman annexation was harsh: the name of Nabataea was suppressed and the royal family as well as the Nabataean aristocracy vanished into obscurity. Fraternal societies (Greek symposia, Nabataean *marzeḥā*) through which Nabataean tribes expressed their power and authority, no longer functioned, judging from the abandonment of their traditional banquet halls (*tri-* or *biclinia*) by the early second century. Although Roman laws concerning associations/gatherings were presumably responsible, these measures bear signs of an intentional repression of identity. Yet in the third century, the region was still known as "the land of Nabaṭ" (Schiettecatte and Arbach 2016, 185–186).

About thirty-five Nabataean inscriptions date to the provincial era in the former Nabataean territory, but the Nabataean script is not attested in Petra after ad 112 (Fiema and Nehmé 2015, 376). Yet there are also remarkable survivals. The Petra Papyri confirm that Christians of Petra still used Nabataean theophoric names. The production of Nabataean fine ware pottery continued in Petra until the sixth century. Linguistically, Greek reigned throughout the Roman-

Byzantine period; Latin was largely restricted to official inscriptions. Presumably, Arabic was already spoken in the Nabataean kingdom, and the toponyms in the Petra Papyri reflect the contemporary dialect of Arabic.

Ostensibly, the fashionable Roman cultural veneer, exemplified by urban embellishment, was relatively superficial, and it never made any significant headway in Arabia. During the otherwise troubled third century, the revitalization of local cultural traditions took place in the east under the Syrian-originated Severan dynasty. Furthermore, Philip the Arab recognized that the strengthening of local identity was best served through the catalyst of the Greek culture. Probably upon conferring the status of *metropolis*, Philip instituted in Bostra the provincial agonistic festival—*Actia Dusaria*—that commemorated both the Nabataean chief deity Dushares and Octavianus's victory over Antony. During the same century, the two eminent Arab sophists, Callinicus and Genethlius, both natives of Petra, practiced rhetoric in Athens.

In the Christian world of late antiquity, Hellenism provided the means for a universally acceptable definition of local traditions. Perhaps the most tangible synthesis of Hellenic and native elements is exemplified by late antique mosaics that demonstrate the transformation of the Roman periphery into a flourishing multiethnic and multicultural center of Hellenism. Vibrant imagery of mythological allegories and personifications blended with traditional frontalism, enriched by intricate floral and geometric designs and countryside scenes, as represented in the mosaics of Madaba, Mount Nebo, Gerasa, Umm al-Rasas, Petra, and survived well into the eighth century (Piccirillo 1993).

Deeply rooted Hellenized Arab culture continued for over a hundred years under the Umayyads. Greek captions figure on Gerasa Christian lamps until the ninth. Early eighth-century frescoes, depicting scenes of hunting and dancing in the best tradition of late antiquity, decorate the Umayyad "desert castle" at Qusayr ʻAmra (Fowden 2004). Chronological systems, such as Eras of Provincia Arabia and of Philadelphia, were still in use in the eighth century. Although the Roman-Byzantine period was only an episode in the long history of Arabia, it left some indelible traces, surviving the end of antiquity.

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